

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: FALKIRK LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - MAIN ISSUES REPORT
Meeting: ECONOMIC STRATEGY AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
Date: 20TH SEPTEMBER 2011
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 introduced a new planning system in Scotland, with revised arrangements for the preparation of development plans. Under this new system, the Council is preparing a Local Development Plan (LDP) for its area. This will be a single plan, replacing both the existing Falkirk Council Structure Plan (approved in 2007) and the Falkirk Council Local Plan (adopted in 2010). The LDP will set out both the broad vision and strategy for the area for a 20 year period, and detailed, site-specific policies and proposals which will guide development for the first 10 years.
- 1.2 The anticipated adoption date for the Falkirk LDP is 2014. Therefore the LDP will set out a detailed land use framework for the period 2014 -2024, and broad guidance on the scale and location of development for the period 2024 - 2034.
- 1.3 The scope and nature of the plan, the process and timescale for its preparation, and the broad intentions for consulting on the plan are contained in the Development Plan Scheme which was approved by the Council in May 2011.
- 1.4 The Council has taken the decision to commence preparation of the new LDP even though the Falkirk Council Local Plan has only been adopted recently. This is to ensure that, taking account of the time taken to prepare the plan, the new plan is in place no more than 5 years from the adoption of the Local Plan. Nonetheless, because the Local Plan is relatively up to date, it is expected that much of its content will be carried forward into the new LDP.
- 1.5 The first major stage in the preparation of the plan is the Main Issues Report. This is intended to be the main tool for consulting on the final content of the LDP. It must indicate the Council's preferred approach to the key planning and land use issues facing the area over the coming years, but must also present reasonable alternatives. This report brings forward the Main Issues Report for the Falkirk LDP for consideration by Members.

2. MAIN ISSUES REPORT

- 2.1 The draft Main Issues Report (MIR), which is appended to the report, has been informed by a range of consultation activity with key stakeholders in the area, as well as by a range of technical studies which will provide the evidence base for the LDP. It comprises the following key parts.

- 2.2 A preferred **vision** for the area is set out in Chapter 2, taking account of how the area has developed over the past 10 years, the current vision and strategy as expressed within the Structure Plan, the legislative and policy context within which the plan is being prepared, and the challenges and opportunities which will face us over the plan period. This would form the basis of the vision statement in the final LDP.
- 2.3 The **main issues** are set out in Chapters 3-5. These are considered to be the key topics where decisions will have to be made on the future development of the area, and where change in the planning framework for the area is likely. There are fourteen such issues, organised under the three themes which form part of the vision: Thriving Communities; a Growing Economy; and a Sustainable Place. For each issue, the recommended preferred approach is highlighted, along with one or more reasonable alternatives, as required by the legislation.
- 2.4 The preferred **spatial strategy** is set out in Chapter 6. This is essentially an executive summary of the key spatial planning components arising from the various preferred options.
- 2.5 **Site schedules and maps** are contained in the appendix. These show, on a settlement by settlement basis, which existing sites are proposed to be carried forward into the LDP and, of the additional sites which have been suggested, which are preferred and which are not favoured for allocation for development.

3. VISION

- 3.1 The preferred vision which is proposed for the area is:

“A **dynamic and distinctive area** at the heart of Central Scotland, characterised by a network of **thriving communities** and greenspaces, and a vibrant and **growing economy** which is of strategic significance within the national context, providing a **sustainable place** to live, work and invest.”

- 3.2 This reflects the vision at the heart of the Strategic Community Plan, My Future's in Falkirk and other corporate strategies, and represents a re-commitment to a future shaped by growth and investment, underpinned by a commitment to sustainable development.

4. THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Main Issue 1: Housing Growth

- 4.1 This considers the overall levels of housing growth that we should plan for in the area over the period 2014-2034. Three possible scenarios are considered: high, medium and low growth. The preferred option is to promote medium growth, with a target of 725 houses on average being built per annum. This level of growth is comparable with historic growth rates over the last 15 years or so, and although this would not meet the levels of household growth projected in the Council's Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, it is considered to be realistic.

Main Issue 2: Sustainable Housing Locations

- 4.2 This issue considers where projected growth should be located. The overall strategy for the period 2014-2024 is to re-affirm existing housing commitments and regeneration initiatives, which were recently endorsed through the Falkirk Council Local Plan, and to supplement this with modest settlement expansions in all areas apart from Grangemouth, where opportunities are very limited and constraints are significant, and Larbert/Stenhousemuir, where school capacity constraints are acute. For each settlement area, the preferred menu of sites is set out, along with possible alternative approaches to growth. In addition, an outline assessment of the longer term potential for growth in the period 2024-2034 has been made. The resulting distribution of growth is indicated in the table below.

Proposed Number of Houses				
	2014-2024			2024-2034
Settlement Area	Existing Commitments	Modest Settlement Expansion	Total	Growth Potential
Bo'ness	685	280	965	High
B'bridge & Banknock	1,270	280	1,550	Medium
Denny	815	350	1,165	High
Falkirk	984	400	1,384	Medium
Grangemouth	76	0	76	Low
Larbert & S'muir	761	0	761	High
Polmont Area	791	460	1,251	High
Rural North	260	30	290	Low
Rural South	1,680	240	1,920	Medium
Total Allocations	7,322	2,040	9,362	
Target Completions			7,250	7,250
Flexibility			29%	

- 4.3 It can be seen that additional allocations have been made, even though the level of existing commitments can in theory meet the 'medium growth' requirement of 7,250 houses (725 per annum 2014-2024). However, Scottish Planning Policy emphasises the importance of providing a 'generous' supply of housing, and it is necessary to have a substantial degree of flexibility in case there are delays or problems in the delivery of committed sites. In other words, to achieve an output of 725 houses per annum, it is in practice necessary to allocate a greater amount of housing land.

Main Issue 3: Housing Need

- 4.4 This issue considers what provision should be made for meeting affordable housing need in the area. The preferred option is to take forward the Council's revised policy on affordable housing (approved by Policy & Resources Committee in August 2011), which will extend affordable housing requirements on private housing sites.

Main Issue 4: Infrastructure for Growth

- 4.5 This issue considers the infrastructure which is needed to support the levels of growth suggested in the Main Issues Report, including transport, water and drainage, education, healthcare, community facilities, open space and green infrastructure. Clearly, at a time of

financial constraints in both public and private sectors, delivering the infrastructure needed to facilitate existing committed growth (which is listed in the Main Issues Report) will be a major challenge. The preferred approach is to minimise additional significant infrastructure requirements, over and above planned upgrades. It is hoped that the strategy of modest settlement expansions which can utilise existing infrastructure capacity where possible, will assist in this regard. Nonetheless, some of the housing allocations will put additional pressures on some schools and further measures may be required to mitigate these pressures.

Main Issue 5: Green Belt

- 4.6 This issue asks what the future role and extent of the green belt should be. The green belt has been a key planning mechanism in the area for 50 years, and various options for its treatment in the LDP are considered. The preferred option is to maintain it, but with a substantial section to the east of the A905 at Skinflats removed, because it does not fulfil green belt objectives, and a small number of minor releases for development at Bo'ness and Falkirk.

Main Issue 6: The Countryside

- 4.7 This issue considers whether any change is needed in the way development in the countryside is controlled. The preferred approach recommends some limited additional circumstances where development would be permitted, including sensitive redevelopment of steadings; limited enabling development to secure restoration of historic buildings; and replacement of houses in a habitable condition.

5. A GROWING ECONOMY

Main Issue 7: Employment Land

- 5.1 This issue considers what employment land is required to support the future growth of the area's economy. The existing supply of strategic and local sites is reviewed to determine whether any should be deleted, or adjusted in terms of their use, or whether any further opportunities are needed. The broad conclusion is that the existing supply is substantial and varied, and the preferred option is largely to reaffirm commitment to these sites, with the exception of the large safeguarded site for petrochemicals at Kinneil Kerse, and a site at Wood Street, Grangemouth, which are proposed for removal as opportunities. A site at Beancross, which would form a redevelopment and extension of the Klondyke Garden Centre complex, is the only additional site suggested for economic development. However, the site lies within the green belt and the Antonine Wall World Heritage Site buffer zone, and development would have to be subject to careful consideration of scale and design. It is proposed that some additional flexibility of use be afforded to some sites, including an element of residential use at the Drum Business Park, Bo'ness.

Main Issue 8: Town Centres and Retail Provision

- 5.2 This issue considers the future priorities for the development of the network of town centres, and whether there is a requirement for new retail facilities. The preferred option is to continue to maintain and enhance the existing network of centres, with a focus on a new strategy for the improvement of Falkirk Town Centre; enhanced food shopping

provision at Denny, Bonnybridge and Bo'ness Town Centres, with new Local Centres to serve the growth areas of Banknock and Whitecross; and maintaining the household goods function of the Falkirk Gateway.

Main Issue 9: Strategic Access and Sustainable Travel

- 5.3 This issue considers what improvements to transport infrastructure are needed to make the area more accessible and to support the local economy, whilst encouraging more sustainable forms of transport. The preferred option is to address outstanding constraints in the strategic and local road network which are essential to accommodate economic and community growth, whilst promoting sustainable transport measures on an incremental basis in conjunction with new development, and as resources allow.

6. A SUSTAINABLE PLACE

Main Issue 10: Climate Change

- 6.1 This issue considers the main land use challenges which climate change presents, and how they should be addressed. Whilst recognising that climate change is an issue that cuts across several policy areas, having implications for many parts of the LDP, the Main Issues Report picks out low carbon development, renewable energy and flood risk and management as key topics.
- 6.2 For low carbon development, the preferred option is to introduce a policy setting out a required percentage reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from new buildings through the installation of low and zero carbon generating technologies. This is a requirement of section 72 of the Climate Change Act.
- 6.3 On renewable energy, the preferred option is to retain the supportive policy framework for renewable energy developments, and to produce a spatial framework for wind energy developments as supplementary guidance.
- 6.4 In terms of flood management, the preferred option is to maintain and update existing policies on flood risk, taking account of new legislative requirements. Measures to address flood risk in Grangemouth will be prioritised, and the potential for managed realignment on the Inner Forth will continue to be investigated.

Main Issue 11: Design Quality & Place Making

- 6.5 This issue looks at how design quality and the creation of attractive, distinctive places can be promoted. The preferred approach is to continue the current approach to design policy and guidance, carrying forward existing policies into the LDP and revising and reissuing key guidance as necessary. A new place-making strategy, comprising revised area enhancement priorities is recommended.

Main Issue 12: The Green Network

- 6.6 This issue considers how the area's network of habitats, landscapes, open space and outdoor access can be protected, enhanced, integrated and managed to complement growth and development. A key aspect of this is how the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) is expressed within the LDP. The Main Issues Report identifies the

CSGN as a network of multi-functional green corridors, expanding the scope of the Falkirk Greenspace Initiative. Provision is also made for the preparation of supplementary guidance on locally designated nature conservation sites and on landscape character and assessment.

Main Issue 13: Cultural Heritage

- 6.7 It is expected that current development plan policies on built heritage and archaeology will be carried forward into the new LDP. However, the Main Issues Report highlights the need to address the issue of enabling development, where additional development is proposed as a means of cross-funding the restoration of historic buildings, and states that a new policy would be brought forward indicating the circumstances in which this would be acceptable.

Main Issue 14: Waste & Minerals

- 6.8 The Main Issues Report does not anticipate any significant policy changes to the existing development plan with respect to the topics of waste and minerals.

7. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 7.1 An extensive evidence base has been assembled to support the Main Issues Report. It has been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and an Environmental Report has been prepared. This has been informed by a site assessment of all sites which have been considered for inclusion in the LDP. A number of technical reports on key topics have also been prepared, as listed under the background papers. An initial equalities impact assessment screening has been carried out, to identify potential interfaces between the LDP and equalities issues. A full assessment will be undertaken in conjunction with the Proposed Plan.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Main Issues Report is intended to be the key vehicle for consulting the public and stakeholders on the approach to development in the area. Following approval of the document, an extensive consultation exercise will be undertaken, the scope of which is set out in the participation statement within the Development Plan Scheme:
- Advert, press release and letter to all stakeholders;
 - Make documents and response forms available online, in libraries and other deposit locations;
 - Minimum 12 week period for engagement;
 - Hold area-based workshops/exhibitions across the Council area;
 - Hold workshops with community councils and other community groups where requested; and
 - Issue Development Plan Newsletter to provide a concise summary of Main Issues Report.

9. IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Legal: The requirement to prepare a Main Issues Report as the initial stage of the LDP is set out in section 17 of the Planning, etc (Scotland) Act 2006.

9.2 Financial: None

9.3 Personnel: None.

9.4 Policy: The Falkirk LDP, once adopted, will constitute the statutory development plan for the area, replacing the Falkirk Council Structure Plan and the Falkirk Council Local Plan.

10. RECOMMENDATION

10.1 That Committee agrees to recommend to the Council that the attached Falkirk Local Development Plan – Main Issues Report is approved for consultation purposes.

Pp

Director of Development Services

Date: 13 September, 2011

Contact officer: Alistair Shaw, Development Plan Co-ordinator, ext 4739

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Falkirk Local Development Plan Main Issues Report – Environmental Report

Technical Report 1: Monitoring Statement

Technical Report 2: Site Assessment

Technical Report 3: Housing Requirements & Settlement Growth Options

Technical Report 4: Strategic Constraints

Technical Report 5: Economy and Employment Land

Technical Report 6: Green Belt

Technical Report 7: The Green Network

Technical Report 8: Renewable Energy

Technical Report 9: Retail and Town Centres

Technical Report 10: Pre-Main Issues Report Consultation Summary