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Our ref: General/40b – Planning Conformity/Final responses/York Northwest AAP I&O

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Sue Houghton
City Strategy
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City of York Council
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Dear Sue

York Northwest Area Action Plan - Issues and Options

The Yorkshire and Humber Assembly welcomes the opportunity to comment on the York Northwest Area Action Plan for York City Council and to continue its involvement in the development of a coherent spatial planning framework for the region. The comments offered in this letter are intended to be within the spirit of continued and productive joint working.

At this stage, the Assembly's response to the consultation document is a set of officer comments. The aim is to highlight where issues related to general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy might arise. When the Area Action Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State a formal Assembly view on its general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy will need to be given.

The following officer comments are made in relation to the existing Regional Spatial Strategy for Yorkshire & the Humber (based on the selective review of RPG12 issued in December 2004), the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy – the Yorkshire and Humber Plan (submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2005) and the Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to the Yorkshire and Humber Plan (September 2007).

Government guidance (paragraph 4.19 in PPS12) states: "Where the regional spatial strategy...has been through an Examination in Public, and the proposed changes have been published, considerable weight may be attached to that

strategy because of the strong possibility that it will be published in that form by the Secretary of State”.

As the Proposed Changes are now published, Assembly responses to consultations on DPDs need to make it clear how the Proposed Changes impact on the policies quoted and to point out to local authorities that ‘considerable weight’ will need to be attached to them by the decision-making body and by Inspectors at Examinations of DPDs. At the same time, it will be important to note that the Assembly itself will be making comments on the Proposed Changes and that the final version of the new RSS is expected early in 2008.

General Conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy

As you know, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced mechanisms to help ensure that Development Plan Documents (DPDs) drawn up by local authorities as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) are in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The intention is to ensure that DPDs are contributing to the delivery of the RSS and that the two strands of the Development Plan for an area (the RSS and DPDs) are mutually supportive and not in conflict.

It will be important in the submitted York Northwest Area Action Plan to highlight the need for there to be ‘general conformity’ between the RSS and the York Northwest Area Action Plan, to ensure that the two strands of the development plan are mutually supportive..

It would be helpful if the dates and status of the current and draft RSS were explained. For clarification current RSS was published in December 2004 and draft RSS was published in December 2005. It will also be helpful to note that the Secretary of State’s Proposed Changes to draft RSS (September 2007) has now been published. The Yorkshire and Humber Plan should be published early in 2008.

It will be important in the submitted DPD to highlight the need for there to be ‘general conformity’ between the RSS and the DPD, to ensure that the two strands of the development plan are mutually supportive. We therefore think it would be helpful if this need for general conformity were set out at the start of the document as this demonstrates the need for a strong link between the DPD and the RSS and will help to clarify the significance of the references to the RSS that may be made throughout the document.

General Comments

Overall, we feel that the consultation papers, the options within them and the baseline report provide a comprehensive review of the issues facing this part of the City of York and how they might be tackled in order to develop a sustainable community.

Below is a summary of the main points the Assembly wishes to raise with regards to the Issues and Options paper. **Annex A** provides further detail for each of these

issues.

1. Welcome the Issues and Options Paper in general and identify a strong link between the overall vision for the AAP and the objectives of the RSS;
2. Raise an issue that the AAP should refer to the wider objectives of the RSS and not only those around economic development,
3. Support references to the wider influence of the site within the Leeds City Region, but raise an issue that the impact on the York sub-area should also be examined,
4. Raise an issue around the location of office development and encourage the City Council to identify the scale and type of office development envisaged in the York Northwest sites so as to ensure that the AAP aligns with RSS Policy E2 on the need to direct office development towards the City of York,
5. Support the delivery of housing and details provided on housing mix, but raise an issue regarding the lack of options on affordable housing levels,
6. Raise an issue that the statement regarding the cost of infrastructure provision and possible non-viability of achieving affordable housing is not fully evidenced and may lead to a lack of alignment with the RSS,
7. Support the approach to social infrastructure and accordance with retail policies in the RSS,
8. Support the approach to transport provision, but point out that future documents should seek to show how proposed development aligns with RSS accessibility criteria,
9. Support the approach to open space, but point out that Proposed Changes to RSS introduced a policy ENV15 Green Infrastructure which should be taken into account.

Regards

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ANNEX A: ASSEMBLY COMMENTS ON YORK NORTHWEST AREA ACTION PLAN ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION (REGULATION 25)

General

In general the Assembly welcomes and supports the proposals for York Northwest. The mix of uses, choice of sites and use of existing infrastructure are in line with the Core Approach of Proposed Changes to Draft RSS (2007) especially Policies YH5 (Regional Cities and Sub Regional Cities and Towns) and YH8 (Location of Development).

At Preferred Options stage the Assembly would expect the AAP to provide more detail on the anticipated levels of growth, how these may be broadly phased and what infrastructure will need to be in place for different elements of the AAP to be delivered. The document correctly advises caution on the levels of development that can be expected to accompany given infrastructure improvements but does not attempt to detail how, for example, the delivery of one park and ride instead of two may impact upon the need/location of a district centre, appropriateness of office development and likely nature and scale of development in general.

There are some detailed points set out below which the Assembly would wish the Council to examine and hope that these will enable a Preferred Options document which is in alignment with the RSS as a whole.

Chapter 2: Area Context

As you know, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 introduced mechanisms to help ensure that Development Plan Documents (DPDs) drawn up by local authorities as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF) are in general conformity with the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The intention is to ensure that DPDs are contributing to the delivery of the RSS and that the two strands of the Development Plan for an area (the RSS and DPDs) are mutually supportive and not in conflict.

We therefore welcome the references to RSS within the context for the role York plays in the regional economy and in section 8 of the baseline report. However, the Assembly wishes to point out that there are wider strong links between the vision for the DPD and both the current and draft Regional Spatial Strategy. Both the existing and draft Regional Spatial Strategies aim to achieve a more sustainable pattern and form of development, investment and activity across the region, putting a greater emphasis on matching needs across the region with opportunities and managing the environment as a key resource. There is a particular emphasis on achieving the regeneration and renaissance of the region's city and town centres by making them the focus for housing, employment, shopping, leisure, education, health and cultural activities and facilities in the region. While the baseline report lists the objectives of Draft RSS future drafts of the DPD should provide more detail as to how it aligns with the RSS as a whole.

The Assembly is encouraged by the reference to the Leeds City Region. However,

the document should also specifically address the role that York and the AAP may play in the wider York sub-area in line with RSS Policy Y1: York Sub-Area and the emerging Core Strategy.

Chapter 3: Vision and Development Objectives

The vision, to create an exemplar sustainable community, is supported. The Assembly is pleased to see that the importance of integrating these developments with the City of York and the wider region is a prominent element of the vision.

Chapter 4: Key Themes, Ideas and Spatial Options

Employment

The RSS seeks to promote office development within town centres. Policy E4 of current RSS (2004) specifically states that "offices should be located in town and city centres" and this is reiterated in Policy E2 of draft RSS (2005) which makes it clear that office use should mainly be accommodated in or adjacent to city and town centres. Policy E2 also states "the sub-regional city and town centres will be the main focus for offices". Proposed Changes to RSS maintain this approach.

In this context the document correctly identifies that the location and amount of office development within York Northwest is an issue. The Assembly recognises that office development in York Northwest may be needed to complement office development in the City Centre. However, the Assembly would wish to caution against a simple approach to such out of centre development.

The Assembly raised an issue on the Core Strategy Issues and Options DPD (30th October 2007) that there may be excessive levels of out of centre office development proposed around York - both in the context of this site and other sites - and the impact that this may have on the city centre.

So as to avoid detriment to the York City Centre office market, whilst providing for office needs for the sub-regional city as a whole, the Assembly would encourage the City Council to be more specific in the AAP about the scale and type of office development proposed in the York Central and British Sugar sites. To some extent this is emerging – the Assembly welcomes the recognition that both sites may serve different markets and have different impacts on the City Centre. Similarly a clear policy direction by means of the Core Strategy should be provided as to the role of the city centre office market. The strategic aim will be to meet the needs of those office developments that cannot be accommodated in the City Centre while discouraging an out of centre location for those that can.

Links between potential small-scale office development and the provision of a District Centre have not been explored.

Housing

The Assembly supports the delivery of housing on these sites as they will form an important contribution towards meeting regional housing targets for York, currently set at 850 dwellings per annum in Policy H1 of Proposed Changes to RSS (2007). The Assembly supports the use of the SHMA in support of this document and is encouraged that a SHLAA will be used to support preferred options.

The RSS seeks to increase the provision of affordable housing in the region. Proposed Changes to Draft RSS Policy Y1 and H3 recognise that there is a particular regional need for affordable housing in York and Policy H3 suggests that over 40% of housing should be made affordable. While the document notes that delivery of affordable housing may be constrained by the need to provide infrastructure improvements there is little evidence to support this. The Assembly would encourage the maximisation of affordable housing in line with Core Strategy and RSS policy.

The Assembly is also encouraged to see reference to achieving housing mix in line with Policy H4 of Proposed Changes to Draft RSS.

The Assembly wishes to raise an issue that figure 3 refers to the potential for infrastructure provision to be a factor in determining how much affordable housing York Northwest can viably support. In the Assemblies view, the AAP, at this early stage of plan making and in the interests of delivering a truly sustainable community, should aim to deliver both. Suggesting at this early strategic stage that affordable housing may be balanced against infrastructure costs may prejudice its maximisation on individual developments. To prevent such an outcome the City Council should be clear in its evidence base the reasons for any such reduction.

Social Infrastructure

The Assembly is encouraged to note that only local shopping provision is envisaged so as to serve the immediate population. The Assembly concurs that in accordance with RSS Policy E2 it will be important to ensure that the City of York is the main focus for retail development and that its vitality and viability should not be adversely affected by retail development in York Northwest.

Transport

The Assembly welcomes the detailed approach to transport and especially the placing of public transport and non-car modes at the heart of the approach. The Assembly would encourage alignment with the Accessibility Criteria contained in Policy T3 of Proposed Changes to Draft RSS. Policy T2 advises the use of criteria to guide the allocation of sites in LDFs and the provision of new transport services.

Open Space, Leisure and Recreation

The Assembly supports the detailed approach to open space, leisure and recreation. The City Council should note that Proposed Changes to RSS introduced

a new policy on Green Infrastructure (Policy ENV15). This sets out the need to identify, protect, create and extend strategic networks of accessible, multifunctional sites as well as linkages.