

Swindon Local Policy Forum

Meeting 3: 25th October 2006

Introduction

The 3rd Meeting of the Swindon Local Policy Forum was held on 25th October 2006 at the Pilgrim Centre, Swindon. The meeting was attended by 30 stakeholders from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Core Strategy, objectives, key issues and options for addressing them.

The format for the day comprised a series of Workshops introduced by the Lead Facilitator, Maureen Darrie from Adams Hendry Consulting Ltd. Maureen was accompanied by a Team of 3 facilitators Emma Barnett, Tim Snell and Andy Turner.

Workshop Session 1 – Spatial Vision and Objectives

In this session the Workshop Groups were asked to identify a Draft Spatial Vision to over-arch the Core Strategy. Some of the Groups found this task difficult to start with but nevertheless three Draft Vision emerged:

1. *Swindon 2026*

To become a thriving town noted for its quality of life; a centre of excellence in terms of level and range of employment opportunities, community and cultural development and a model of sustainability.

Growth areas will be linked by an efficient and sustainable transport system.

The rural connections will be maintained.

2. *Swindon should be the best in terms of everything it does. It should be a place to be proud of. Access and transport should be tailored to suit the needs of everyone's aspirations with integrated and sustainable planning reducing the reliance on the car.*

3. *To develop a focussed identity for the Borough of Swindon, whilst respecting its history; to ensure the timely growth of Swindon whilst protecting, respecting and improving the built and natural environment; and continue the economic prosperity of Swindon making it a place where people want to LIVE, work and play.*

The fourth Group did not write a specific vision but identified a series of statements the vision might contain including: *accessible, vibrant, safe, successful, best business location in Southern England, outside London.*

It is interesting to note the degree of commonality between the Draft Visions and a focus on developing "excellence", prosperity and enhancement.

The second part of the Workshop involved writing a series of objectives for the plan centred around the following key themes:

- Transport
- Sustainable development
- Housing distribution
- Employment distribution
- Local distinctiveness
- Green infrastructure
- Countryside and villages

- Regeneration

The detailed outcomes are reported on the Outcomes matrices however a number of key themes emerged under each topic.

Transport

Under this topic heading the groups generally agreed that there is a need to improve accessibility around the Borough and to develop a more integrated transport system. Transport needs to be accessible and affordable.

Sustainable development

Key objectives emerging under this heading include the need to ensure that future construction activities use sustainable materials and that the Borough adopt sustainable practises in terms of waste and energy.

Housing distribution

Common objectives arising under this heading include the need to continue to provide for housing growth, though in a sustainable manner linked to employment provision areas. Sustainable communities should form a key part of the approach to housing provision.

Employment distribution

There was general consensus that an objective should be framed around the need to link employment provision and housing and that employment allocations should be planned to ensure they are accessible.

Local distinctiveness

The groups felt that Swindon has lacked local distinctiveness and objectives should ensure that the image of Swindon is developed, marketed and maintained. There was also general agreement that heritage is important and the old character should be blended with new developments.

Green infrastructure

Common objectives related to maintaining green spaces especially the Community Forest and the role it plays in providing access to rural areas. New development should be required to include green spaces and green corridors should be developed as links between parts of the Borough.

Countryside and villages

The villages should be protected and enhanced. Every effort should be made to maintain a vibrant rural community and appropriate new development should not be precluded from these areas.

Regeneration

Regeneration is required in areas outside the town of Swindon and that should not be forgotten. Regeneration should be appropriate and focus on local needs.

Workshop 2 – Issues and Options

In Workshop 2 Groups were asked to look at the key issues and options for addressing them under the same series of headings.

Transport

Many issues were identified under this heading including inadequate car parking, grid locked system and lack of accessibility and integration. The Groups identified a large number of options for addressing the transport issues and a common theme centred around an improved, reliable integrated system. There were suggestions of light rail and rapid transit and the need to develop park and ride facilities.

Sustainable Development

Key issues identified included unsustainable planning practise, impact of cars on climate change and lack of forward / bold thinking to ensure development is truly sustainable. Various options were put forward including the need to have specific planning policies to address sustainable building.

Housing Distribution

The main issues identified by the groups related to a lack of supply of the “right” type of housing. There is a need for balanced and mixed communities with appropriate services and access to the integrated transport system. This is not the current situation. The Groups generally felt that the areas identified as growth areas were appropriately located though reservations were cited about links to employment.

Employment Distribution

Employment areas have traditionally been located to encourage transport by car. Traffic issues are significant. The outcomes from the Groups in terms of options varied but included the need to think about links to housing areas, retention of town centre sites and the need to think more radically in terms of major sites if Swindon’s image as a centre of excellence for education / research is to be maintained as there may be further need to identify larger sites.

Local Distinctiveness

The main issue identified related to the fact that there was nothing obvious that made Swindon distinctive. The Borough lacks identity. A number of interesting options were discussed including championing good design, promoting the Borough as a model of sustainability and generally the “best”. This was reflected in the Draft Spatial Visions.

Green Infrastructure

This was considered important and it was generally felt that there is a lack of quality green infrastructure. In terms of options the Groups felt that the provision and maintenance of green infrastructure should be high on the list of considerations relating to new development and regeneration. Green spaces assist in maintaining amenity and environmental / natural enhancements.

Countryside and Villages

The Groups strongly believed that the countryside should be protected and they recognised that a vibrant rural economy forms part of that. Local services are being lost and that compromises the rural community. The Groups felt that protection is paramount but some development is appropriate. It was generally felt that settlement boundaries should be protected but the approach to development should be flexible.

Regeneration

The Groups felt that regeneration should be undertaken on a sequential basis and that regeneration should focus on the needs of the local community with appropriate mixed uses.

CONCLUSIONS

The Stakeholders actively engaged in the Forum meeting and provided extensive and valuable outcomes for consideration by the Officers.

Maureen Darrie
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