



# Ryedale District Council

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**REPORT TO:** Policy & Resources Committee

**DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> February 2008

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Forward Planning & Economic Development Manager, Julian Rudd

**SUBJECT:** Ryedale Local Development Framework:

- Planning Advisory Service Diagnostic
- Resource Issues

**WARDS AFFECTED:** All

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## 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To summarise the findings of the recent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Diagnostic of Ryedale District Council's forward planning activities and to agree use of additional resources identified to accelerate progress on the production of the Ryedale Local Development Framework (LDF).

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION

**That Members accept the contents and recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service Diagnostic and endorse the approach to use of additional resources for the Local Development Framework that is set out in Section 5 of this Report.**

## 3.0 REASONS SUPPORTING DECISION

3.1 The LDF is key element of Council strategy and guides land-use change in the District. It is crucial to achieving several corporate objectives, including delivery of affordable housing, and key elements of the Community Strategy. The PAS diagnostic makes clear recommendations regarding the need to increase resources for LDF production at Ryedale District Council. Members have also expressed concerns about the rate of LDF progress that is possible given current staffing and resource levels. Officers were requested to investigate the feasibility and costs involved with accelerating the LDF process. The

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Financial Services Manager has identified additional funding for the LDF and this can be combined with the part-use of the Planning Delivery Grant award for LDF related projects (as was agreed at the 6 December 2007 meeting of this Committee) to accelerate the LDF timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION**

- 4.1 The PAS aims to facilitate self-sustaining change and continuous improvement in the local authority planning sector, to help provide faster, fairer, more efficient and better quality services. PAS is part of the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA).
- 4.2 PAS undertook their LDF diagnostic of Ryedale District Council's Forward Planning service on the 3rd December 2007, when several officers were interviewed, along with the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of this Committee. The diagnostic tool is designed to provide recommendations on organisational, procedural and resource issues around the production of the LDF.
- 4.3 Following a request at the December 2007 meeting of this Committee, officers have been investigating the feasibility and costs involved in accelerating the proposed timetable for the production of the LDF Core Strategy, with a view to reporting details to a future meeting of the Committee.

#### **5.0 REPORT & OPTION APPRAISAL**

- 5.1 The PAS diagnostic (a copy of which has been emailed to all Members) has recognised many examples of good practise at Ryedale, notably:
  - clear support from the Leader, Elected Members and Senior Officers;
  - corporate working and work with partners, including the LSP; and
  - that much has been achieved with limited staffing resources.
- 5.2 It identifies the key issues for the Council as being the need to ensure that Member support is maintained and does not wane as a result of frustration at progress. It notes that progression relies upon resources and resolving some policy tensions but concludes that the timescales for the production of the LDF (agreed by the Policy & Resources Committee in December 2007) could be collapsed if more resources were available.
- 5.3 The PAS makes 'Recommendations for action' by the Council. In terms of resource and staffing issues, the following recommendations are made are, in priority order:

- Urgently fill the Planning Officer and Technician posts
  - Ensure the current team is practically supported with respect to morale and that use of additional resources allow sustainable working hours for team members
  - Prepare a detailed project plan and resource schedule for all aspects of the LDF (to include a programme for the further engagement of members and parish and town councils)
  - Increase staffing resources commensurate with the work programme and ensure a secured budget for the Local Development Scheme period
  - Seek experience with respect to effective recruitment strategies of authorities with similar experience.
- 5.4 PAS has also offered three support/training packages, free of charge. At least one of these will be targeted specifically at Members. Dates for these events are currently being discussed.
- 5.5 In response to the PAS diagnostic recommendations and the earlier request by this Committee to investigate how additional resources may be best used to accelerate delivery of the LDF, discussions have taken place with the Corporate Management Team about alternative approaches. In addition to the £50K toward LDF examination costs (i.e. Inspector's fees and legal costs) over the next 3 years that was reported to this Committee in December 2007, further resources have been identified that could be used towards actual LDF staffing or consultancy costs. The identification of this amount will be discussed at the 7 February 2008 meeting of Policy & Resources (Budget) as part of the appropriation of the estimated surplus for 2007/8. However, this involves around £50K, with a further £16K already in the base budget for the LDF, making a total of £66K available. Furthermore, the use of the latest Planning Delivery Grant (PDG) award as agreed by this Committee in December 2007 included the following block of spending:
- “LDF Progression & Market Town Renaissance (to include sustainability appraisals of LDF Development Plan Documents, progression of new Planning Charge, Renaissance Market Towns project progression including master plans and site briefs, economic development related activity, A64 junctions evidence and other transport studies, river-rail site projects) - via fixed term contract posts or contracts for specific projects - £65K”*
- 5.6 Clearly there is a need to fund certain non-LDF projects from this block of PDG spending but it is anticipated that around £40K of this £65K allocation of PDG can be combined with the £66K identified (see paragraph 5.5 above) to give an overall amount of around £106K to accelerate progress on the LDF.

- 5.7 Consideration of alternative options has focussed on the following four options:
1. Additional member / s of staff; or
  2. Use of consultants to produce entire Development Plan Documents (DPDs); or
  3. Use of consultants to carry out specific tasks required as part of the production of Development Plan Documents; or
  4. Option 1 and 3 combined.
- 5.8 However, as indications have become clearer regarding the amount of additional funding that may be available for the LDF without significantly impacting upon the Council's budget, it has become necessary to discount Options 2 and 4. This is because investigations into the cost for using consultants to produce entire DPDs (Option 2) suggest a wide range of fees between £120K and £400K plus. Given that even the lower figure exceeds the additional funds available at Ryedale DC this option has been discounted. Similarly, because the costs associated with a grade 7 forward planner post over 3 years would use up the £106K that is available, Option 4 has also been discounted.
- 5.9 Of the two remaining options (1 and 3), the preferred option is to use consultants to carry out specific tasks required as part of the production of DPDs (Option 3). This is because:
- This approach has been used successfully by other local authorities in North Yorkshire;
  - This option allows time intensive tasks to be undertaken by consultants whilst allowing Ryedale planners to steer and control the overall policy approach and content of the DPDs;
  - Experience of recruiting planners has shown that it is difficult to attract sufficiently experienced candidates. The Council is already advertising for one Forward Planner following approval by Corporate Management Team to fill the currently empty post in the Unit (NB this action also addresses the first recommendation from the PAS diagnostic). However, given the national difficulties in recruiting planners there can be little confidence that it would be possible to recruit two suitable candidates within the short-term;
  - The funding available would only allow a 3 year fixed term contract to be funded, as opposed to a permanent post. It is expected that this would act as a further deterrent to recruiting a suitable candidate.
- 5.10 The details of the specific tasks that would be undertaken by consultants are still being finalised as part of the production of a detailed project plan and resource schedule (which was recommended in the PAS diagnostic). However, the work areas being considered include:
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- sustainability appraisals of LDF Development Plan Documents;
  - progression of work on the new Community Infrastructure Levy
  - consultations on submitted development sites
  - identification of site selection criteria and analysis of submitted sites.
  - progression of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA),
- 5.11 It is anticipated that use of the identified funding to employ consultants in the proposed manner will bring forward the agreed LDF timetable by up to 12 months.

## **6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The decision on whether to direct £50K of the Council's estimated surplus for 2007/8 to assist production of the LDF will be taken at the 7 February Policy & Resources (Budget) meeting. This report seeks authorisation for the approach to using this and other elements of funding (£40K from PDG and £16K from the base budget, giving a total £106K) to accelerate production of the LDF.
- 6.2 Members should note that additional investment in the LDF would hasten the identification of a five-year land supply in the District, and improve the likelihood of the Council being rewarded under the forthcoming Planning and Housing Delivery Grant.

## **7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The effects of not having an adopted Local Development Framework are that members of the team have had to prioritise significant input to a growing number of current and emerging major development proposals, which have complex policy and strategy implications. The Unit has also lead work on two major land-use studies and has a key role in progressing many aspects of land-use and transport related work that are clearly a priority for Ryedale members and the community. Current capacity in the Unit prevents acceptable rates of progress on the LDF and other related projects and initiatives relating to opportunity and choice of housing and employment and effective transport (i.e. the Council's corporate aims).
- 7.2 In order to limit the risk of additional investment not leading to significantly quicker deliver of the LDF it will be necessary to closely project manage the contracts and ensure that the LDF is progressed in accordance with the detailed project plan and resource schedule (currently being produced).

## **8.0 CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 In view of the considerations that are detailed within this Report, the recommended use of additional financial resources to accelerate production of the LDF is considered to be timely and fully justified.

### **Background Papers:**

*PAS Diagnostic of Ryedale District Council January 2008-02-03 [EXEMPT]  
P&R Committee Agenda 6 December 2007 – LDF and PDG Reports*

### **OFFICER CONTACT:**

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