

## Generating options

### 1. Why consider other options?

1.1. Following the agreement of your visions and objectives you may be tempted to launch straight into the writing of the plan policies. Before you do, it is essential to consider all the options available for the following reasons:

- there may be alternative ways of achieving your plan and objectives;
- a key element of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) work is to consider the impact of your plan proposals on the environment;
- to give you the opportunity to consult your community, which will provide you with an understanding of the community's preferences.

### 2. Types of options

2.1. Options can be understood to be possible solutions to existing and future challenges/issues affecting your community. Alternative options can be generated from ideas established by the parish council, neighbourhood forum, or from other consultation exercises that may have been held within the community such as a village survey of issues, constraints and opportunities. Likewise, if you have developed a vision and objectives you may wish to identify different options to help address them.

2.2. The options you may wish to pursue may vary depending on whether you intend to have a neighbourhood development plan with general, specific or detailed policies. Below are several examples of the types of options you could include:

- If you are considering allocating sites for housing and/or employment you will need to have considered all the alternative allocation sites to ensure that the selection process has been carried out in a robust and transparent way.
- The scale, type, mix of any new development - if you are proposing housing to meet your local needs what sort of housing is required - how many family sized houses or smaller homes suitable for the elderly or those first starting their own homes; how much should be market housing.
- Alternative ways of using land that the local community has identified as being appropriate for development or other uses, such as open space or environmental improvement.
- Different 'conditions' that could be applied to development, such as how development should look (its design), how transport issues should be incorporated, or issues such as renewable energy or landscaping.

2.3. The options developed must be credible, justifiable and achievable.

2.4. When considering options it is usual in planning to include a 'do nothing option' (also known as 'business as usual'). This is what would happen if the neighbourhood plan was not prepared. This would be the option if you decided to rely on the policies in the West Berkshire Local Plan.

2.5. It is also important to consider the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) screening, and the outcomes of any necessary assessments, and whether there are any significant adverse implications upon the environment and designated site. If this is so, a different approach should be undertaken.

- 2.6. Once you have collated your options it is advised you check they conform to national policies, such as those within the National Planning Policy Framework, and local strategic policies, such as those within the Local Plan.
- 2.7. It is also recommended you keep a clear record of how the different options were generated and considered. This will help reduce the risk of anyone challenging the final draft of your plan. It will also ensure the policies included in your plan are the most appropriate to address the issues raised and the vision your community aspires to.

### **3. Test the options**

- 3.1. Once the options have been defined you should run them past your local community. This will ensure the decision making process is open and transparent. In addition, it will inform you with an understanding of what your local community consider key options.
- 3.2. When presenting options to the community, it is better to keep them simple and site or subject specific rather than presenting a complex set of options. To help people make a more informed decision, we advise you explain the thinking behind each option in full, with lists of possible advantages and disadvantages.
- 3.3. You can publish the information in local newsletters, magazines or on the website with an invitation for people to comment. You could also organise an event, or series of events, which may be open days/exhibitions, workshops or informal discussion groups.
- 3.4. Below are several questions you may wish to ask when consulting your community on the options:
  - Have we identified the right options?
  - Are there any options missing?
  - Which option(s) do you prefer and why?

### **4. After the consultation**

- 4.1. Whilst the public consultation may not lead to a clear preference it will help inform you on your final choice. As such, the parish council or working group will need to seek to achieve consensus and minimise conflicts when reaching a rationale decision. These options can then be taken forward to provide the detail and policies within your neighbourhood plan.