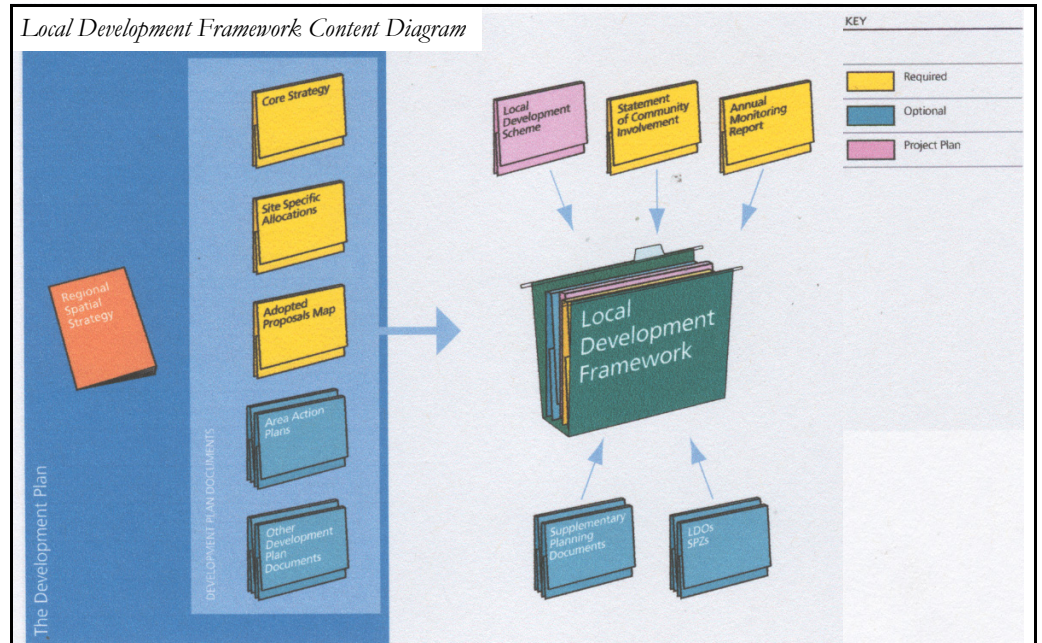




Core Strategy

This document will set out the most important overall planning policies within the borough. For example, it will identify sustainability principles, housing strategy, protection of the Green Belt and areas of high landscape value, and broad locations for housing and employment development.

Some change will need to be accommodated within Dacorum, if the Borough is to flourish as a place in which to live and work. Additional housing needs to be built, for example. No change is not an option that can be considered within the core strategy.



The following issues are beginning to emerge from the work done so far.

Housing

The level of housing that needs to be met within Dacorum to 2021 is currently 6,300, though this could possibly change. The East of England Regional Spatial Strategy sets this figure. Approximately 1,305 homes have already been built since 2001 and there is currently planning permission for another 726 homes. Recent research suggests that there is potential for up to 6,000 homes within the existing built up areas (including the existing commitments and completions 2001-04).

Issue 1

What is the most sustainable location strategy? We feel that the broad location of new development should take into account access to facilities such as jobs, shopping, health and education facilities and good transport links. Hemel Hempstead currently has the greatest range of facilities. Also, it appears from the urban capacity study that most future urban development opportunities are located in Hemel Hempstead. Significant opportunities are likely to arise from redevelopment of the civic zone and possibly from work to the Kodak building. Should the Council continue to focus future development at Hemel Hempstead to support the existing facilities, supported by smaller amounts of development in the other settlements. Alternatively the council could seek to disperse the housing allocation more evenly across the major settlements, to support and/or expand existing facilities. This could result in additional greenfield development.

Issue 2

The potential urban capacity suggests that there will be no need to allocate further greenfield sites for housing development. However, to accommodate this number of additional dwellings in the urban area, development would need to take place on for example, vacant and derelict land, through intensification of existing uses (eg. building in back gardens), redevelopment of some existing

housing, converting commercial buildings to residential use. Greenfield sites identified for housing in the existing Local Plan (and which are not in the Green Belt) would be needed. The approach would help to protect the existing Green Belt boundary. If all development cannot be fitted into the existing urban areas, urban extensions would be needed.

Issue 3

The Government guidelines encourage housing development to be between 30 and 50 dwellings per hectare. This is higher than has generally been achieved historically within Dacorum. An example of a development at this density is the John Dickinson's redevelopment scheme off Belswains Lane (36 dwellings per hectare).

Some planning applications exceed this level of density eg. the development of flats at 1 St Albans Road. Are higher densities acceptable in certain locations such as Hemel Hempstead town centre? The appropriate type of development in more suburban and rural communities needs to be considered.

Employment

Dacorum has a thriving economy with low unemployment levels - 1.6% at April 2005 (though this is above the county average of 1.4%). There is a range of employment types, with the majority of jobs being in the service sector i.e. offices and retailing. Many of the employment opportunities are located in Hemel Hempstead.

New employment development will mostly occur through the redevelopment of existing sites. There is a major greenfield employment development opportunity, located at Three Cherry Trees Lane in Hemel Hempstead. This is a longstanding proposal for a predominantly technology site.



Issue 4

The Three Cherry Trees Lane site has not been developed for technology uses even though it has been designated for this use for a considerable time. We therefore need to ask why. Is it appropriate to restrict the employment uses to technology use and is this the most appropriate site? We believe an alternative employment site exists along Breakspear Way.

Issue 5

The Maylands Avenue area is the main employment area in the Borough. Elsewhere there are smaller pockets located throughout the Borough serving the populations outside Hemel Hempstead. Should this broad position be maintained? A dispersed range of employment uses could help to reduce traffic congestion.

Issue 6

If the key employment site at Three Cherry Trees Lane is relocated to Breakspear Way, the future of the allocated site will need to be considered. The site could be left undeveloped and kept in reserve for longer term needs. Alternatively, a greater proportion of local housing needs could be accommodated if the site were developed for housing. This would exceed the housing allocation given in the draft regional plan and the Council would need to argue for this to be increased.

The Government is seeking the release of excess employment land to other uses such as housing. There have already been significant losses of employment land within Dacorum, for residential development and further losses are scheduled within the existing Local Plan. It needs to be considered whether there is any further potential for further losses of employment land, particularly in Hemel Hempstead. Some existing sites could be redeveloped and substitute employment provided at the key employment site.

Hemel Hempstead town centre is changing, with the Riverside development under construction and a development brief being drawn up for the Civic Zone. These will reinforce the sub regional status of Hemel Hempstead. However, there are issues around the balance of uses – eg. do we need more parking, more cafes, more small stores, housing, offices?

Infrastructure

The Dacorum area is already highly congested. Therefore, any major development will have infrastructure implications. Infrastructure includes roads and other transport infrastructure, schools and health facilities. The infrastructure impacts from the development of major sites are easier to measure, with

contributions for infrastructure improvements easier to calculate. If the development is scattered around many smaller urban redevelopment sites the cumulative impacts are harder to assess and secure. Improvements to infrastructure will be easier to assess once broad locational decisions have been made.

Environment

A significant proportion of Dacorum is covered by either Green Belt, or the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The remainder is covered by a rural area designation. The proposed vision suggests that we continue to protect the Green Belt and areas of high landscape quality.

Community Facilities

We see key community needs being generally linked to the development of major sites. Existing shortages in provision need to be addressed by developments though contributions will not necessarily be limited to one particular site. Community buildings need to be attractive buildings and set high design standards for the adjoining developments.

