

South Gloucestershire Council response to the Budget announcements on 'Planning for Growth' statement dated 23rd March 2011

On 23rd March 2011 the Minister for Decentralisation issued a written Ministerial Statement. This sets out the Government's expectation that the planning system should promote sustainable economic growth and jobs and ensure that the sustainable development needed for economic development is able to proceed as easily as possible.

South Gloucestershire Council recognises that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will take the principles set out in the ministerial statement into account when carrying out his duties and that significant weight will be attached to the need to secure economic growth and employment. The Council therefore welcomes this opportunity to respond to these new announcements in the context of its Core Strategy and forthcoming EiP.

This response sets out how South Gloucestershire Council considers the Core Strategy will help to deliver the objectives set out in the coalition government's statement.

South Gloucestershire Council Response

Supporting sustainable patterns and form of development

In considering the Planning for Growth Statement South Gloucestershire Council understands that the Government has an expectation that the answer to development and growth should wherever possible be "yes". However, we also recognise that it importantly goes on to qualify in the statement by stating: "*except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy.*" The Ministerial Statement must therefore be considered alongside national policy statements on sustainable development such as PPS1.

South Gloucestershire has experienced major development over the last 30 years. This has had and is continuing to have significant impacts on the quality of life – as seen by current high levels of congestion. South Gloucestershire Council fully understands the importance of economic growth and job creation to the wealth and social health of the nation. However, we also consider that growth that is not supported by the necessary investment in supporting infrastructure and which significantly impacts on the environmental assets and characteristics of the District is unlikely to deliver the intended economic benefits and may actually undermine not just these objectives being achieved, but the wider economic priorities as a result.

PPS1 states that development plans should carefully consider the inter-relationship between social inclusion, protecting and enhancing the environment, the prudent use of natural resources and economic development. It goes on to give an example, by recognising that economic benefits, if properly planned for, can have positive social and environment benefits, rather than negative impacts, and that environmental protection and enhancement can in turn provide economic and social benefits. This very much reflects the context within which South Gloucestershire Council has developed its Core Strategy. The Council therefore welcomes the opportunity to put the following points to the inspector to explain how the initiatives and actions of the Council and its Core Strategy support the announcements set out in the 'Planning for Growth' Statement.

Supporting economic growth

The key aim of the Planning for Growth statement is to ensure that the planning system does everything possible to support economic growth and sustainable development to help rebuild the British economy. The ethos of this objective is one shared by the West of England authorities and encapsulated within the Vision for the West of England (EB45) and the West of England Local Economic Partnership (LEP) submission document (<http://www.westofengland.org/media/191203/west%20of%20england%20lep%20proposal%20september%20201.pdf>).

The South Gloucestershire Core Strategy expresses the Vision for the West of England and the strategic aspirations for economic growth in the area. We therefore consider that the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy is a positive mechanism for promoting sustainable economic growth and expresses the Government's objectives as follows:

- The plan's vision, spatial objectives and development strategy provide for communities' needs, commercial and industrial development, food production, minerals extraction, and new homes while respecting environmental objectives.
- It is pro-active in driving and supporting growth through the identification of strategic allocations and the requisite infrastructure investment to enable development to take place. Such as:
 - growth at the New Neighbourhoods at Cribbs/ Patchway, East of Harry Stoke, North Yate and Thornbury
 - identifying and safeguarding strategic employment sites;
 - strategic sewerage infrastructure improvements;
 - the new Stoke Gifford Transport Link; and
 - transport packages across the district.
- Environmental considerations are fully integrated into the plan's policy framework and represent a cornerstone of the plan. As a result the Plan provides the policy framework to enable South Gloucestershire Council to plan positively – to achieve carbon reduction and climate change adaptation and mitigation– while providing sufficient growth to meet existing and future residents' needs, whilst fully respecting landscape, heritage, biodiversity and environmental assets.
- The Core Strategy is evidence based and focused on deliverable growth within social, economic and environmental capacities, and therefore represents sustainable development. The Core Strategy, through its supporting evidence base, identifies and meets the housing, business and other development needs of the District in a sustainable and deliverable way.

Strong presumption in favour of sustainable development

South Gloucestershire Council supports the principle of the statement by Government. Given the extent to which development activity influences economic growth and the social health of the nation, it is clearly important to actively and appropriately support the contribution that investment and regeneration make to the well being of the country. However, the Council also considers that South Gloucestershire has experienced major development over the last 30 years. This has had and is continuing to have significant impacts on the quality of life – as seen by current high levels of congestion. We therefore consider that decisions affecting our communities and existing and future residents should be taken on the basis of relevant planning considerations that assess development proposals in terms of whether they provide

the best way of tackling local circumstances rather than meeting imposed requirements. For this reason, the Council feels it is important to have an up to date development plan in place that allows clear, fair and transparent planning decisions to be made and which will provide the platform for progressing our LDF to enable the Council to ensure that the right development comes forward at the right time and in the right place.

Cross boundary working

South Gloucestershire Council recognises the importance of cross boundary working. The Council has an excellent track record of working with our neighbouring authorities in the West of England in a range of areas:

- Vision setting - Vision for the West of England 2026
- Economic growth - Local Economic Partnership
- Housing - Strategic Housing Market Assessment published 2009
- Waste planning - Joint Waste Core Strategy adopted 2011
- Minerals planning - sub-regional apportionment
- Green Infrastructure - West of England GI Framework
- Infrastructure Planning and Delivery – West of England Delivery and Infrastructure Plan
- Transport - Joint Local Transport Plan & Major Scheme Bids

Responsive to change

South Gloucestershire Council supports the Ministerial Statement that local planning authorities should be sensitive to the fact that local economies are subject to change. This is particularly expressed in the Core Strategy's position on future development in Thornbury and Yate. The Core Strategy provides flexibility and contingencies in order to ensure that growth can be appropriately managed and delivered. We have also fully recognised the impact of the economic slow down and effect this has had on housing delivery.

Addressing viability issues and focused on delivery

South Gloucestershire Council has sought to ensure that wherever practical and feasible planned development goes ahead. The Council has a good record of working with development partners. At a recent appeal decision (APP/P0119/A/10/2138335) the inspector, in dismissing an appeal for development in the Green Belt, recognised that the Council is working closely with development partners to renegotiate planning obligations and bring forward sites to secure housing delivery. The Inspector stated:

“Mindful of the historical problems with undersupply, the Council is now very alert to the need to provide an adequate supply of housing land”

and went on to state:

“...the Council's actions in seeking to work more closely with the house building industry is to be commended...”

This clearly demonstrates the actions that the Council is undertaking to progress economic development in line with the Planning for Growth Statement.

Moreover, the Council is continually developing its understanding to ensure that no unnecessary burdens are put in place of the delivery of the New Neighbourhoods. The

Council can demonstrate a good and constructive working relationship with development partners who are bringing forward these important sites. As our Reg 30 (d) Consultation Statement makes clear, extensive progress has already been achieved through joint consultation events during the progression of the Core Strategy and more recently through master planning events for Thornbury and North Yate.

Joined up government

South Gloucestershire Council welcomes the commitment to a joined up approach to planning for growth across the government departments. South Gloucestershire Council has worked closely with the Environment Agency in producing flood related studies, Natural England with the Green Infrastructure planning and the Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) work, as well as the Highways Agency and English Heritage on relevant topics and issues. We are also working very positively with the Department for Transport to take forward Major Scheme Bids – see Policy CS7 and supporting justification of the Core Strategy. This is critical to addressing congestion, which we recognise is a major barrier holding back our economic potential. However, we also recognise that without a clear delivery strategy to secure this strategic investment, further development would be likely to lead to unacceptable traffic and congestion and would therefore diminish any arising the economic benefits that it might help to support. We consider it is important these matters are given full consideration as part of the EiP and therefore very much welcome this objective within the Ministerial Statement.

Fully integrating environmental considerations

As stated above, South Gloucestershire Council fully understands the importance of economic growth and job creation to the wealth and social health of the nation. However, we also consider that environmental considerations are a fundamental part of achieving sustainable development.

Communities cherish the environment, landscape and heritage of South Gloucestershire for its intrinsic value and the role it performs in creating a sense of place and in defining townscapes, in both the urban and rural parts of the district. It is this environmental quality and resultant high quality of life that people who live and work in South Gloucestershire enjoy that in turn acts as a driver for economic activity. Therefore the impact of development proposals upon the quality of the environment needs to be carefully considered as part of developing the Core Strategy and determining development proposals.

In preparing the Core Strategy these matters have been incorporated and integrated into the plan's overall vision, spatial objectives and development strategy. Moreover, in planning for sustainable communities and meeting the needs and requirements of future and existing communities the Core Strategy expresses this through the policy framework as follows:

- It supports the principles of localism – through encouraging decision making at the lowest appropriate level. The Core Strategy represents a community led approach to the planning for the future needs of existing and future residents.
- The Green Belt is fundamentally valued by both our rural and urban communities – for the role it performs as a check against urban sprawl, preventing coalescence, maintaining communities' separate identities, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, and keeping land permanently open for the enjoyment of and access to the countryside from the urban areas for all residents.
- Continues to protect the most important landscape, biodiversity and heritage assets in the District – AONB, RAMAR, SAC, SSSI areas and the conservation areas and listed buildings. It also recognises the contribution that environmental assets make to the

character, distinctiveness and sense of place of the District and communities of South Gloucestershire.

Conclusion

South Gloucestershire Council recognises the announcements set out in the Planning for Growth Ministerial Statement. We very much consider that the Council's actions through its working practices, high level vision and the development of the Core Strategy development strategy and policy framework will help to deliver to the Ministerial Statement by:

- promoting sustainable economic growth and jobs
- enabling economic growth to proceed as easily as possible while not compromising key sustainable development principles and protecting the Green Belt,
- providing an up to date, robust, flexible and fair planning policy framework that is proactive and positive;
- fully recognising environmental issues as an integral part of sustainable development
- being evidence based and responsive to communities aspirations; and
- prepared jointly with our communities and partners to focus on what we can do.

The Council has a proven record of working with communities, statutory organisations, neighbouring authorities and development partners to bring forward sustainable development. It is supportive of economic growth and is delivery focused.

The timely adoption of the Core Strategy will provide the necessary clarity and assurance to the development industry to ensure that it can bring forward the planned economic growth.

South Gloucestershire Council, Spatial Planning Team, 7th June 2011