



CABE is now part of the Design Council

DC Cabe workshop – 10th May 2012

Notes for Luton Borough Council

Location: Design Council Cabe, London

Present:

Luton Borough Council

Kevin Owen – Local Plans Team Leader

Jackie Duncan – Local Projects Team Leader

Design Council Cabe Panel

Fred Manson – Chair

Heather Cheesbrough – Panellist

Graham King - Panellist

Design Council Cabe Staff

Kathy MacEwen – Head of localism and planning, Design Council Cabe

Jonathan Freeman – Panel Advisor, Design Council Cabe

Jacob Willson – Observer, Design Council Cabe

Alan Thompson – Observer, Design Council Cabe

Brian Quinn – Observer, Design Council Cabe

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Thank you for attending the Design Council Cabe Local Plan workshop on 10th May 2012. We appreciate the time and effort you made in preparing for this, and for taking the time to travel and attend the session in London.

Listed here are the informal workshop notes. These are not Design Council Cabe formal comments, and are merely to act as an aid for any points you may not have captured on the day. We hope that you find them useful.

Key points

1. Embarking on their new local plan, Luton have an opportunity to fundamentally recast how growth can be achieved in a smarter, more sustainable way within their boundaries.
2. Luton has many unique selling points, not least its excellent links to London. A clear vision will help to articulate these points to communities and investors alike.
3. A design-led approach – brainstorming, using plans and drawings – will help to crystallise ideas about growth and help communicate these to Members and the public.

Summary

Your record in attracting investment in your borough is impressive and speaks for your positive attitude towards growth. The development of a new local plan for Luton provides the opportunity to hit the reset button, take a step back and decide where you want to go. The urgency to adopt a new plan for Luton should focus minds on getting the basics right: how Luton is positioned regionally, the structure of your place, transport and movement, employment and housing density, and landscape. A design-led approach - drawing plans that express your aspirations spatially – will provide a good starting point for discussions with Members and engagement with the public in June. This will help you quickly determine where best to concentrate your resources and come to swift conclusions on how to balance need with opportunity.

The discussions held in the workshop can be summarised under the three headings taken from [Planning for places](#): telling the story, set the agenda and say it clearly.

Telling the story

- Taken together, your strategic location relative to London, recent investment in transport infrastructure, proximity to the Chilterns, and major economic assets, such as your airport, give you a competitive advantage that provides a strong foundation for future growth. However, without a compelling story that paints a clear picture of what this means for Luton it will be hard to both inspire communities to play a part in this and attract potential investors.
- One way of building a compelling narrative that describes the Luton of today and where you want to go is to map your existing and soon to be realised assets, such as

the Busway. Such brainstorming exercises will allow the structure of Luton to be quickly understood, and help to identify future opportunities to be explored with Members and the public in June.

- In particular, understanding how improvements in transport and movement will allow both easier access to London and the countryside, as well as employment, housing, retail, leisure and community uses to be better connected, should help to frame the way growth across Luton is planned.

Setting the agenda

- The withdrawal of the Joint Core Strategy highlighted the stark challenge of accommodating future housing growth on Luton's constrained edges. Therefore, you need to establish the capacity of the borough to deliver up to nineteen thousand homes within your boundaries.
- If you are to look within your existing boundaries to accommodate such growth, there is an opportunity to promote the intensification of select district and neighbourhood centres tied to enhanced public transport nodes to create a more compact town and borough.
- There are risks associated with defining the high number of centres currently proposed. In our view, an approach that consolidates retail in fewer, more accessible centres as the focus for intensification would represent the most sustainable solution for Luton in the long-term. More resilient to a fluctuating economy and a fast changing retail landscape, the enhanced profile and differentiation of these centres should help you advise potential investors on where and what type of development you would like. This model allows you to reposition centres not identified as growth points to allow them to serve other community functions, as has been achieved in several London boroughs, including Southwark and Tower Hamlets.
- Pursuing such a spatial strategy has implications for your skyline. Therefore, it is important that you are clear in your mind how the scale of built form should develop across the growth points identified and how this will be managed to ensure the best design and sustainability outcomes.
- Equally, having a clear idea about the type and location of jobs sought for the borough and the new hotspots for employment will be critical to developing your already strong employment base. Napier Park's unique selling point is its strategic location beside Luton airport. Planning for growth associated with the airport's expansion and its enhanced public transport links to London and the rest of Luton will ensure you are ready to attract similar investment that might otherwise go to your competitors.

- Understanding the role that major employers should play in supporting vibrant places and communities is also important. Opportunities to build stronger links with the University to allow co-provision of community functions like libraries and sports facilities could be investigated. Likewise, the workshop revealed the potential for expanded training programmes and apprenticeships for local communities with the growth of Luton airport.

Saying it clearly

- Your concluding comments in the workshop summed up precisely how your vision should be communicated by asking the question 'What is it going to be like to live in Luton?' Your local plan will need to paint a clear picture to communities and investors and send a positive message about the direction Luton is headed.

Further Design Council Cabe support

Design Council Cabe run a number of services that can help you deliver your planning objectives. These services include:

- Mapping and visioning exercises
- Councillor design training
- Councillor visioning exercises
- Neighbourhood planning design support
- Design workshop days

If you are interested in any follow up services from Design Council Cabe, then please contact Jacob Willson on 020 7420 5254 / Jacob.willson@designcouncil.org.uk