

NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT RURAL ECONOMY STUDY

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23 March 2005



NORTH NORFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

BRIEF FOR A STUDY INTO THE NORTH NORFOLK RURAL ECONOMY

PART 1:- STUDY BRIEF

Introduction

As part of the formulation of the Core Strategy and Site Specific policies for the North Norfolk Local Development Framework (LDF) the District Council needs to gather evidence and develop a deeper understanding about issues impacting on the district's rural economy in order to frame a set of policies which support the local economy and protect the unique environment of North Norfolk.

We are therefore seeking to appoint consultants to produce a technical study of the district's rural economy, including an analysis of recent trends in employment and business activity within the agricultural and related business sectors in North Norfolk and a review of Government Guidance as detailed within PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas; and thereafter make recommendations to the Council as to the policy interventions which could be incorporated within the new LDF being prepared for the district. Such policies should seek to support and encourage the continued competitive performance of the agricultural sector of the economy through future business investment and farm diversification strategies.

In addition to undertaking primary research into those issues impacting upon agricultural businesses in North Norfolk over the past decade and undertaking a review of Government Guidance in respect of such matters, the study should also evaluate the effectiveness of existing Local Plan policies to establish whether they have been successful in their objective of seeking to support the retention of business activity and employment in the more rural parts of the district and propose how these policies should be adapted / revised in the context of preparing a new LDF for the district covering the period to 2021.

Background

The North Norfolk District covers an area of 960 sq km, much of which is high quality agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) supporting mostly arable production – particularly cereals, sugar beet and potatoes. Agriculture is the predominant land-use in the district; and as well as being an important element of the economy in its own right, the farming community makes a significant contribution to maintaining the character of the area, much of which is designated as being an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or of high landscape value, thereby underpinning the district's attraction as a major tourist destination.

The North Norfolk district is one of the most rural local authority areas in the East of England and has agricultural employment above the regional and national averages. Whilst the sector continues to be a key element of the district's economy, increasing mechanisation and the contracting out of landholdings / key activities means that fewer people are employed in the sector than in the past. Changing trends in production and the demands of food processing companies are also impacting on farm businesses, resulting in surplus agricultural labour and buildings being released by some farm businesses. At the same time other farm enterprises are investing in new and larger buildings eg, potato stores, poultry sheds etc and workers with different skills sets as part of a re-focussing of their businesses to take advantage of new opportunities and / or as part of diversification / down-sizing strategies.

There is also some evidence to suggest that wider commercial pressures have impacted negatively on the agricultural economy in the district, with a number of businesses in the machinery supply, seed, feed and fertiliser sales etc, consolidating their operations on larger sites and premises beyond the North Norfolk District – perhaps from facilities serving the whole of Norfolk from sites with better transport access – ie along the A47, A11 and A140 corridors.

Over the period since the adoption of the North Norfolk Local Plan in April 1998, changes have taken place within the agricultural sector of the economy which are perhaps not adequately addressed through the existing policy framework – ie there is a lack of commentary within the Local Plan specifically related to the commercial environment which farm businesses operate within and the pressures this has created locally in recent years for applications for on-farm potato stores and proposals for major poultry shed developments. Further, the Council is concerned that policies within the adopted Local Plan relating to the re-use of redundant rural buildings in the Countryside have in the main seen conversion to use as second / holiday homes rather than to workshop or office space for business occupation at a time when the supply of business premises is severely constrained and therefore the potential to retain employment in locations beyond the principal towns may not have been realised to the extent intended.

Objective

The objective of the study is to provide information on the current performance of and potential future impacts on the rural economy in order to inform the formulation of policies in the Local Development Framework.

The District Council therefore needs to develop a deeper understanding of such issues in the formulation of policies for inclusion within the Local Development Framework to be prepared for the district and to this end wants the appointed consultants to prepare a report which considers such matters and makes some comparative assessment of the experience of other remote rural districts with respect to similar issues.

Scope and Methodology

It is suggested that the study takes the following form:-

1. Context statement

To cover the following issues:

- To understand the nature of agricultural holdings in North Norfolk – ie size and type of holding in terms of ownership and activity and any change in the nature of the stock over the period since 1990.
- Commentary on the decline / changes in agricultural employment – numbers, skills, age of workforce etc over the period since 1990.
- Commentary on levels of profitability of farm businesses and the drivers for change – eg increased investment in poultry rearing; trend towards co-operative working in the potato sector, impact of EU legislation / grant interventions and increased use of contractors etc.
- Commentary on levels of business activity and trends in related sectors – ie agricultural engineers and machinery suppliers; seed and feed merchants, haulage companies, specialist professional services such as property agents, accountants etc; field sports.
- Commentary on the extent of farm diversification in North Norfolk, which is perceived to be at lower levels than in other parts of the UK and heavily focussed on the sale of surplus building assets for redevelopment as second / holiday homes generating one-off capital receipts rather than providing a source of ongoing revenue income to the farm business and supporting rural employment as a replacement for the jobs lost from the contraction of the agricultural workforce either

through converting premises for business use, adding value to agricultural produce or running a farm tourism enterprise alongside the existing farm business.

- Anticipating the future in terms of increasing consumer expectations for organic and traceable foods, growing of bio-fuels and to what extent these may provide opportunities for North Norfolk farm businesses.

2. Review of current Local Plan policies as they relate to the agricultural sector

The study should review existing Local Plan policies as they relate to the agricultural sector and consider the extent to which they can be seen to have achieved their original objectives. Some assessment should also be made to the extent to which existing policies might need revision in order to assist the District Council and its partners through the Norfolk Norfolk Community Partnership address community aspirations in the future.

Policies to be reviewed would include:-

Policy 22: Agricultural Land;

Policy 23: Prior approval of Agricultural and Forestry Buildings;

Policy 29: The re-use and adaptation of buildings in the Countryside;

Policy 66: Agricultural and forestry workers dwellings in the Countryside;

Policy 76: Farm Diversification;

Policy 88: Farm Shops;

Policy 117: Horses

- specifically whether these policies support or constrain the competitive performance / diversification of farm enterprises. With particular reference to Policy 29 some analysis needs to be undertaken to establish the constraints on buildings being converted to business use – eg highways, levels of demand, cost of conversion relative to rates of return etc.

Policy 67: Removal of Agricultural Occupancy Conditions – whether in light of the contracting agricultural workforce and the pressure with regards the supply of affordable housing in the district, this policy could be revised to allow permanent occupation as an “affordable” home – ie managed through some form of private leasing agreement through the District Council or an RSL, thereby generating a rental income for the farm enterprise; rather than the dwelling remaining vacant or being sold as a permanent / second home / holiday dwelling.

3. Review of national planning policy guidance

The study should make appropriate references and linkages to PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and the Rural White Paper and any other relevant recent reports / policy papers issued by organisations such as the NFU, CLA, CBI, Countryside Agency, CPRE.

4. Comparative assessment of the experience of other remote rural districts with respect to similar issues

The report should make some assessment of the experience of other remote rural districts with respect to the development of policies which support the continued viability of farm businesses and farm diversification. Particular reference should be made to those authorities which have obtained “Beacon” status in their support for the Rural Economy.

5. Recommendations for LDF Core Strategy and Site Specific policies and proposals

The report should make some recommendations to the Council as to draft policies / proposals which could be included within proposed consultation exercises conducted as part of preparing an LDF for the district.

Output

Delivery of a report addressing each of the five issues detailed above; together with a series of recommendations which can be considered by the Council in the context of developing policies for inclusion within the new LDF being prepared for the district.

Four hard copies of the report should be provided; together with a version of the report provided in a disk format, containing maps, graphics etc which can be reproduced by the Council as required.

Timescale

It is anticipated that the appointment of consultants to undertake this task will be made during the week commencing 18th April 2005; with the final report to be presented to the Council by **Friday 24th June 2005**. It would be expected that the consultants would be asked to give a presentation of their report to the Council’s Local Development Framework Working Party at a date to be agreed in early / mid June.

Cost

The Council estimates that this study should be undertaken within a budget of £30,000. The evaluation of tenders will therefore involve consideration of the approach taken by those submitting proposals so as to achieve maximum value for money / added value from the available budget.

Contact Details

The main officer contact within the Council for this study will be Steve Blatch, Head of Regeneration and Strategic Housing (sblatch@north-norfolk.gov.uk) Tel: 01263 516232.

The appointed consultants will be provided with a list of further contacts both inside the Council and within stakeholder groups whom the Council believes should be approached during the course of undertaking the study.

PART 2: TENDER ARRANGEMENTS

Timetable

The timetable envisaged for the study is as follows:-

30.03.05	Tender document sent to all interested consultants
15.04.05	Submission of tenders to Council
20.04.05	Contract awarded
wc 25.04.05	Initial contract meeting with appointed consultants
mid June	date to be agreed – presentation of draft report to Council
24.06.05	Final report delivered to Council

Tender requirements

The document submitted for tendering purposes for the rural economy study report should contain the following information:

- i) An overall description of the methodology / approach to be adopted
- ii) A list of the information to be collected/ data sets used
- iii) A description of the assessment process to be used.
- iv) Details of the outcomes to be contained in the final report in line with the enclosed brief.

In addition to the above, consultants should submit: -

- a) Evidence of a successful track record in undertaking similar work
- b) The names and C.V.s of the key staff to be involved in the project with a clear indication of the time allocations for the leading members of the team.
- c) The identity of any other consultancies that may be engaged for elements of the work, also covering b) and c) above.
- d) The proposed time scale and project plan for the commission.
- e) The overall cost for completing the study.

Tender Submission

In accordance with North Norfolk District Council's Standing Orders Relating to Contracts (April 2004) :

A tender shall not be valid unless it has been delivered to North Norfolk District Council at Council Offices, Holt Road Cromer NR27 9EN not later than **midday on Friday 15th April 2005** in a plain sealed envelope marked for the attention of Steve Blatch, Head of Regeneration and Strategic Housing, bearing the word "TENDER" followed by "Rural Economy Study". Envelopes must not include any information whatsoever as to the identity of the person or firm submitting the Tender. (Tender labels are enclosed for this purpose)

Four copies of the tender (one in electronic version) should be supplied.

Brief for Work required

The brief for the work required is outlined in Part 1

Other Information

A fixed price (including all disbursements i.e. travel and subsistence expenses) is required for this contract.

The Tenderers should also provide details of hourly rates that will be charged to undertake work outside of the Brief for work required e.g. for appearance at planning inquiries/ examination.

The successful contractors will be responsible for their own staff when undertaking survey work and are expected to obtain any necessary consent from landowners to access privately owned land should this be required.

This study will inform the preparation of policies for inclusion within Local Development Documents. The work will also inform decisions on existing and future development proposals. It is therefore imperative that the work is transparent, robust and defensible at examination and public inquiry.

North Norfolk District Council will retain the intellectual property rights for the final report. The Council will retain the right to publish the study report and any data / information produced on its behalf and will remain the owner throughout and after the project. Permission will have to be obtained from the Council prior to any reproduction of the report or research data, by a third party.

Consultants bidding for the contract can e-mail questions to sblatch@north-norfolk.gov.uk Answers will be provided to all consultants registered as bidding for the contract.

An electronic version of this document is available upon request.

Evaluation of Tenders

Tenders will be assessed against the criteria (a)-(h) set out below. Scores will be awarded on the basis of how well each element of the tender meets the specified criteria. The contractor with the most points will be awarded the contract.

- (a) Cost.
- (b) Whether the methodology proposed by the tenderer and the expected final report will meet the Council's requirements.
- (c) Whether the methodology to be employed is transparent and robust. Contractors may provide evidence of where they have undertaken similar work and how it has been used.
- (d) Whether the contractor has an adequate track record in the areas of work required. Contractors should submit details of previous work.
- (e) Whether the particular individuals who will be assigned this contract have experience of this type of work and / or this particular area.
- (f) Whether the work can be completed within the specified timescale. If contractors consider the work will take longer than specified by the Council, then they should explain why the work cannot be completed within that timescale and submit a revised timetable for the work.
- (g) Whether the final output, including the report and guidance will have any disclaimers, caveats and contingencies attached. It is important that the assessment can be used to inform planning decisions for development and will be defensible at public inquiry examination. Any disclaimers or caveats that would undermine this should be specified by the tenderers.
- (h) Whether the Council is confident in the ability of potential contractors to defend their work, particularly at public inquiry examination. Tenderers should state their intentions if requested by the Council to give evidence at planning inquiries / examinations, either for planning applications or Local Development Documents. Contractors can provide evidence of where they have been requested to defend their work and specify whether they have been successful or not.

Contractors are advised to consider these points and provide information in their submissions that will enable the Council to clearly and easily assess information on each of the criteria.

Working Arrangements

Those submitting tenders should indicate where they consider departure from any of the arrangements set out in this document may be necessary including timescale and should include a draft work programme outlining the various stages through which the work should progress.

The appointed consultant must follow the Council's standing orders and financial regulations in respect of insurance, liability and Codes of Practice.

The appointed consultant must provide verbal progress reports on a weekly basis.

The appointed consultants will, in addition to providing four hard copies and a version of the report in a disk format which can be used by the Council to reproduce further copies; be required to present their principal conclusions and recommendations to a meeting of the Council's Local Development Framework Working Party or other such meeting of members as the Council proposes.

Payment

Payment will be made on the following basis:

One third of the agreed tender price on appointment

The balance of payment to be paid on satisfactory completion of the study.

Conditions

Prior to the date for submission of proposals the Council may clarify, correct modify or add to the Brief. A copy of each addendum will be issued to every Tenderer and shall become part of the Brief, receipt of each addendum shall be promptly acknowledged by email or in writing by Tenderers.

The submission of a proposal does not commit the Council to the use of the consultant's services.

The Council will withdraw from using the services of the consultant at any time during the project if it is not satisfied with the standard or quality of work.

The cost and content of any work outside the specification of this Brief which is regarded as “additional” or “further” work must first be agreed by both the Council and the Consultant before it is undertaken.

This brief has been prepared by Steve Blatch, Head of Regeneration and Strategic Housing. It is a public document and has been issued to a Select List of Contractors who have previously indicated their interest in undertaking such a study on behalf of the Council through responding to an advert placed by the Council.

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