

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	23 May 2012
3.	Title:	Publication Core Strategy
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services

5. Summary

The report seeks Cabinet endorsement of the Publication Core Strategy and approval to undertake public consultation. Consultation would take place during summer 2012 and would focus on issues of soundness and legal compliance.

6. Recommendations

- 1. That Cabinet endorse the Publication Core Strategy.**
- 2. That Cabinet approve the Publication Core Strategy for public consultation.**

7. Proposals and Details

Purpose

As a statutory requirement the Council is preparing a Local Plan for Rotherham (previously called the Local Development Framework). The two key documents contained within the Local Plan are the Core Strategy, and the supporting Sites and Policies document.

Following significant community engagement and comment, much of which was site specific rather than raising concerns with the overall strategy and vision, a revised version of the Core Strategy has been produced. This is the Publication Version and, subject to approval from Members, is the version of the Core Strategy that we intend to submit to government for approval.

In preparing the Publication Core Strategy regard has been had to:

- Consultation comments and feedback
- Recommendations of the Integrated Impact Assessment including Sustainability Appraisal)
- The Localism Act and changes to national planning policy
- Whether any elements of the Regional Strategy should be retained (assuming that these documents will be abolished by the Government)
- Legal advice
- Feedback as a result of our involvement in the Planning Advisory Service's free Direct Support programme
- The outcome of cross boundary discussions with neighbouring authorities

The Publication Core Strategy sets out the Council's vision for the future development of the Borough between 2013 and 2028, and the strategic policies to guide investment and development decisions to achieve this vision.

Vision and objectives

The vision for the future of Rotherham Borough is:

Rotherham will be prosperous with a vibrant, diverse, innovative and enterprising economy. It will fulfil its role as a key partner in the delivery of the Sheffield City Region recognising the close economic, commercial and housing markets links with Sheffield and our other neighbouring authorities.

Rotherham will provide a high quality of life and aspire to minimise inequalities through the creation of strong, cohesive and sustainable communities. Rotherham will be successful in mitigating and adapting to future changes in climate. It will have a sense of place with the best in architecture, sustainable design and public spaces. Natural and historic assets will be conserved and enhanced. Rotherham will promote biodiversity and a high quality environment where neighbourhoods are safe, clean, green and well maintained, with good quality homes and accessible local facilities, making best use of existing infrastructure, services and facilities. A network of green infrastructure will link Rotherham's urban areas with the wider countryside, providing access to green spaces and acting as habitat links for wildlife.

The largest proportion of growth will be focused in the Rotherham Urban Area including major new development at Bassingthorpe Farm which is key to delivering growth in the heart of Rotherham. Regeneration of Rotherham town centre will enable it to fulfil its role as the borough's primary retail, leisure and service centre. Considerable development will take place on the edge of the urban area at Waverley, with the development of a new community and consolidation of the Advanced Manufacturing Park. Significant development will also take place in Principal Settlements for Growth: in the north around Wath, Brampton and West Melton, on the fringe of Rotherham Urban Area at Wickersley, Bramley and Ravenfield, and in the south-east at Dinnington, Anston and Laughton Common. New development will also take place in the borough's principal settlements and local service centres. Throughout Rotherham development will aim to create self contained communities which support a network of retail and service centres, where the need to travel is reduced and communities enjoy good access to green spaces and the wider open countryside.

The vision is underpinned by 17 objectives, addressing the key issues facing Rotherham over the next 15 years, covering subjects ranging from the provision of sufficient new homes to protection of the environment.

Strategy

In anticipation of the abolition of regional strategies, the Council is proposing a **lower** local housing target (the only Council within South Yorkshire to do so) of **850 new homes a year**. This is in line with an assessment of the latest evidence on future household growth and the capacity available on suitable sites. This will require 12,750 new homes to be built over the 15 year plan period from 2013 to 2028. Provision will also be made to accommodate any backlog against the 850 homes per year between 2008 (the base date of key population and household projections) and adoption of the Core Strategy in 2013.

The local housing target will enable us to meet our housing requirements whilst also ensuring that we can reduce the need for the release of Green Belt land. This level of proposed growth is also broadly comparable with the Borough's growth over the last 15 years of more than 10,000 new homes.

Based on a review of employment land, it is considered appropriate to provide for around **230 hectares** of employment land for new economic development with up to an additional **5 hectares** of land to accommodate new office floorspace. The overall strategy will result in sensible growth across Rotherham which has regard to local characteristics. Most new development will be focused in the Rotherham Urban Area (including at Bassingthorpe Farm) and at Principal Settlements for Growth at:

- Wath, Brampton and West Melton,
- Dinnington, Anston and Laughton Common, and
- Bramley, Wickersley and Ravenfield.

Within this plan period it is anticipated that development at Bassingthorpe Farm will deliver 1,700 homes and 11 hectares of employment land.

Green Belt Review

Local Plan preparation has been informed by a sustainability and constraints assessment of potential sites for development. This work has now been enhanced by an assessment of all Green Belt areas in the Borough to consider their relative contribution to the Green Belt Purposes as defined in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework:

1. to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
2. to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
3. to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
4. to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
5. to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

This work was guided by a methodology that was prepared in conjunction with the Planning Advisory Service and subject to stakeholder consultation.

Government Guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account when reviewing Green Belt boundaries. Development in areas important for Green Belt (i.e. those that strongly contribute to the defined Green Belt purposes) can still, depending on location, promote sustainable development.

The Green Belt Review has not itself decided which sites should be identified for new development. The Review is only part of the process of selecting site allocations as the Council must seek to combine consideration of sustainable locations with an assessment against Green Belt Purposes.

However, the Green Belt Review has helped informed selection of the Core Strategy's 'Broad Locations for Growth'. Some parcels of land at Bassingthorpe Farm and Dinnington East contribute strongly to some Green Belt Purposes but nevertheless these areas remain favoured because of their relatively sustainable location when considered against other areas.

The Green Belt Review and the Integrated Impact Assessment of potential alternative urban extensions has also helped identify the Core Strategy's areas of search for 'safeguarded land'. Safeguarded land will be removed from the Green Belt (through the Sites and Policies document) to ensure the longer term permanence of the Green Belt boundary and provide flexibility should further land for new development be required beyond 2028. Although removed from the Green Belt we will ensure that the current principles of Green Belt policy will apply to safeguarded land within this Plan period. Development of any safeguarded land would require a review of the Local Plan and assessment of the land in relation to the need for development at that time and the most appropriate locations for development to take place.

Our Core Strategy approach, including a local housing target, will mean that only 0.6% of the Green Belt will be required to meet our needs to 2028. Providing flexibility through safeguarded land to meet our potential long term requirements to 2033 would result in a maximum of 1.5% of the Green Belt being released over the next 20 years.

As part of ongoing work the Green Belt Review will be further progressed at a more detailed level to help identify the site allocations to be shown in the Sites and Policies document.

Core Strategy Policies

The Publication Core Strategy contains 33 policies grouped under seven themes designed to meet the main aims of the strategy, which are:

- to implement a strategy that **delivers new development in sustainable locations**
- to deliver housing developments which **create mixed and attractive places to live**
- to support developments, including business, industry, retail, leisure and tourism which **support a dynamic economy**, including Rotherham's network of retail and service centres
- to **support movement and accessibility** within Rotherham through successful public and private transport networks, as well as encouraging walking and cycling
- to **manage the natural and historic environment** to protect and enhance Rotherham's green infrastructure, bio and geodiversity and water environments, as well as guide minerals related development and deal with flood risk
- to **create safe and sustainable communities** by supporting safe, healthy, sustainable and well designed places, as well as the delivery of renewable energy and appropriate community facilities
- to **ensure that the necessary new infrastructure is delivered** to support the Plan's spatial strategy and that decisions are taken with regard to the national **presumption in favour of sustainable development**.

As well as providing for new homes and employment, the Publication Core Strategy's suite of policies covers a range of related subjects such as retail provision, heritage protection, flooding, biodiversity, greenspace and climate change.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

The National Planning Policy Framework requires the Local Plan to be supported by work to assess the quality and capacity of existing infrastructure and its ability to meet future demands arising from new development. An Infrastructure Delivery Schedule (supported by a more detailed Study) is therefore included in the Core Strategy.

The Study has examined the costs and funding sources for the required infrastructure and identified a list of costed schemes. It also highlights periods where specific action on infrastructure will be required to enable development to take place.

Supporting documents

The Publication Core Strategy will be supported by:

- An Infrastructure Delivery Study which identifies the infrastructure required in order for delivery of the Core Strategy over the Plan period

- An updated Integrated Impact Assessment which will comprise Sustainability Appraisal, and Equalities and Health Impact Assessments.
- A number of background reports which provide more detail on the evidence base which justifies the strategy and policies.

The selection of sites to deliver the Core Strategy will be made through the Sites and Policies document, which will also contain more detailed Development Management policies. This document has not been finalised yet and will be subject to further public consultation; therefore there will be further opportunity for Members, stakeholders and residents to have their say on which sites should be developed and the policies to guide any new development.

Consultation

This “publication” stage allows for formal representations to be made in connection with specific issues of soundness and legal compliance (i.e. whether the Core Strategy is justified, whether it is effective, whether it is consistent with national policy, whether it has been positively prepared, and whether it has been produced in accordance with relevant legislation and regulations).

Subject to approval by Cabinet the Publication Core Strategy will be published for statutory consultation in June 2012 for a 6 week period. The document will be made available to view via the Council’s website, and at Council customer service centres and libraries throughout the borough. Given the nature of the consultation, community engagement events are not considered appropriate, however planning officers will be available to answer questions during normal office hours. An indicative timetable of consultation activity is set out below:

- May: Briefing note circulated to Members / MPs
- 15 June: Members briefing: drop in session
- June: Press briefing / press release
- Week beginning 18 June : Notification of consultation sent to consultees on Local Plan database
- 25 June: Start of consultation. Documents available on Council website, and at all libraries and customer service centres. Planning officers available throughout consultation period to answer queries and assist people in making their comments.
- 6 August : Consultation closes
- August / September / October: Consultation comments analysed, list of suggested amendments compiled and Core Strategy prepared for submission to Central Government

Future timetable

Following approval by Full Council, it is intended to submit the Core Strategy to Government towards the end of 2012, along with any objections received as a result of consultation on the Publication Core Strategy and any proposed minor changes.

Subject to a timetable to be established by the Planning Inspectorate, the independent examination is expected to take place early in 2013, with a view to adopting the Core Strategy by July 2013.

8. Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Costs of consultation will be met from existing budgets.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Endorsement by Members of the Publication Core Strategy is sought to enable public consultation and progress towards adoption.

- The Localism Act and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) express a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development. The NPPF allows a 12 month transition period after which our UDP policies will have diminished weight in decision making. It is important that Rotherham's Core Strategy is in place as soon as possible to provide an up-to-date planning policy framework for the Borough's future growth and development.
- A failure to achieve timely progress on the Local Plan could delay the spatial strategy required to guide future decision-making on planning applications.
- Having a Local Plan in place will provide a steer for any neighbourhood plans that may emerge under the provisions of the Localism Act.
- Failure to make progress with the Local Plan risks delayed provision of the new homes and employment opportunities that the Borough needs.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The implementation of the Local Plan will make a positive contribution to all of Rotherham's Regeneration priorities. When adopted, the Core Strategy and supporting documents will further the objectives of the Corporate Plan and support the delivery of the Rotherham Sustainable Community Strategy by:

- providing sufficient good quality homes
- ensuring well designed, decent affordable housing
- providing employment land to meet the needs of the modern economy and support sustainable communities through access to employment opportunities
- promoting the "town centre first" policy approach to help the regeneration and renaissance of Rotherham Town Centre and other retail and service centres within the borough.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

LDF Publication Core Strategy (July 2012)

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