

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	19 December 2012
3.	Title:	Focused Changes to Rotherham’s Core Strategy
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services

5. Summary

The report seeks Cabinet endorsement to undertake consultation on focused changes to the Core Strategy.

6. Recommendations

- 1. That Cabinet approve consultation on the Core Strategy Focused Changes document.**

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.

The Publication Core Strategy was subject to consultation between June and August 2012. Having taken account of representations received and following a re-assessment of the document, a schedule of further changes to the Core Strategy has been drawn up, the majority of which are minor and are intended to improve its clarity. Members may recall the report to Cabinet on 5 December which set out a revised approach to submission of the Core Strategy following our most recent legal advice. This approach will see submission of the Core Strategy following revocation of the Regional Strategy by Government. Government has not yet indicated when this will be, however consultation on these Focused Changes in line with legal advice will not add further to delay to the Core Strategy's progress towards adoption.

Core Strategy Focused Changes

The draft Focused Changes document will be made available to view by Cabinet Members prior to the meeting, via committee services.

The proposed changes range from correcting typographical errors and improving clarity of wording, to more substantial changes (but none of which alter the overall thrust of the Core Strategy or particular policies). A key proposed change is to amend the housing figures in Policy CS1 and other relevant maps and diagrams. Policy CS6 clearly sets out that housing provision will consist of the requirement derived from the local target of 850 homes per year and also the shortfall in delivery against this target from 2008; however figures provided in Policy CS1 currently don't include this shortfall. Amending the figures to show the implications of the housing requirement plus shortfall will ensure consistency between Core Strategy policies to provide a clearer, more transparent document. The shortfall will be distributed across settlements broadly in line with the growth strategy set out in the Core Strategy.

The Council's intention to adopt a lower local housing target as opposed to the higher regional target is unchanged.

Other Focused Changes include:

- Revised wording of policies and supporting text in relation to infrastructure delivery and developer contributions
- Words of clarification in relation to Green Belt and Safeguarded Land Policies
- Amendment to Policy CS10 to improve flexibility by indicating that where appropriate and viable the Council will seek to enter into local labour agreements to promote access to training, education and local employment opportunities.
- Amendments to Policy CS12 (managing change in Rotherham's retail and service centres) to ensure closer alignment with national planning policy
- Revised wording of Policy CS26 (Minerals) to require the criteria in part 1 of the policy to apply to all proposals for non-mineral development in Mineral

Safeguarding Areas (except for householder development / changes of use not involving excavation or building work)

- Words of clarification in light of the recent announcement that Maltby Colliery may be mothballed, and an indication that consideration will be given to its potential to contribute towards meeting some of the borough's growth requirements
- Clarification of the flexibility / contingency in place to deal with changing circumstances and key risks likely to be associated with delivering the Core Strategy
- Retention of a number of saved UDP policies originally proposed to be superseded by the Core Strategy but which are more appropriately retained until superseded by more detailed policies through the Sites and Policies DPD.

Consultation

It is proposed to consult on the Core Strategy Focused Changes. This may be subject to minor amendment prior to consultation depending on the outcome of ongoing evidence base work (primarily the Whole Plan Viability Assessment, and Integrated Impact Assessment studies). It will need to be viewed in conjunction with the Publication Core Strategy which is available on our website and copies of which have previously been distributed to all libraries and customer service centres.

The consultation will invite representations in relation to the 'legal compliance' and 'soundness' of the Focused Changes but not the Publication Core Strategy itself.¹ This is NOT an opportunity to repeat or raise further points about the original plan, or to seek further changes.

Subject to endorsement by Members the Focused Changes will be published for consultation in January / February 2013 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 list of consultation activity is set out below:

- Briefing note to be circulated to Members, MPs and Parish Councils
- Press notices
- Notification of consultation to be sent to consultees on Local Plan database
- 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.

The consultation period is expected to run between 14 January – 25 February, however precise dates may vary depending on the logistics of document preparation and distribution.

¹ The legal compliance and soundness tests are concerned with whether the plan 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).

All representations received, along with the Council's response will be submitted to the Inspector appointed to undertake examination of the Core Strategy. The results of the consultation will also be included in the consultation statement which must accompany the submission of the Core Strategy.

8. Finance

The costs associated with this consultation will be met from existing Planning Policy team budget.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Endorsement by Members of this consultation prior to submission of the Core Strategy is sought to enable progress towards adoption.

- The Localism Act and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) express a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development. 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

Core Strategy Focused Changes (January 2013)

Publication Core Strategy (July 2012)

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/6665/publication_core_strategy_june_2012

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