

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	9 July 2014
3.	Title:	Rotherham Local Plan: Adoption of the Core Strategy
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services

5. Summary

Approval is sought for the Core Strategy to be referred to Council for formal adoption as part of Rotherham's Local Plan. Following public examination, the inspector's report on the Core Strategy has found it to be "sound" subject to some limited changes.

6. Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the Inspector's report and his recommended main modifications.
2. That the Core Strategy, as modified, is referred to Council for formal adoption as part of Rotherham's Local Plan.
3. That the Council delegates authority to the Planning Manager and Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways and Street Scene Services to make any minor changes (e.g. typing errors, formatting and images) necessary prior to publication of the adopted Core Strategy.

7. Proposals and Details

Background

Rotherham's Local Plan consists of two documents; the Core Strategy setting out the broad amount and distribution of future growth and the Sites & Policies document setting out the detailed sites and development management policies to deliver this growth. The Local Plan will replace the existing Unitary Development Plan in guiding growth and investment decisions and deciding on planning applications.

The Core Strategy has to set targets for new homes and land for employment over the next 15 years. It sets out the vision, strategic objectives, strategy and policies to guide public and private sector investment and to manage development and regeneration in the borough.

Since 2005, we have consulted on the Core Strategy with local residents and businesses, interest groups, statutory bodies, services within the Council and elected members. This culminated with us submitting the document to the Secretary of State on 6 June 2013 for examination by an independent planning inspector. The inspector had to decide if the Core Strategy is "sound", in other words does it comply with the law and is it fit for purpose.

We have now received the inspector's final report on the Core Strategy examination.

After looking at our plan the inspector at first said our target should be much higher. We presented more evidence at a further hearing and made a strong case for our lower, local housing target. The inspector has now given us his final verdict and has agreed with our case.

This is excellent news for Rotherham.

The Inspector has said that the Core Strategy is sound subject to some limited changes. He considers that we have fully met all the legal requirements and have complied with the duty to co-operate with other authorities and bodies, noting that there is *"...ample evidence to demonstrate the Councils commitment to co-operation."*

The inspector has agreed with our arguments on the fundamental issue of setting a local housing target based on our own assessment rather than having a target imposed from above. He has clearly given great weight to the evidence we submitted and the arguments we presented at the examination hearings. Throughout his report he commends the Council on our evidence and approach.

To put this in context, we are one of the very few authorities who have submitted a Core Strategy since the National Planning Policy Framework to have achieved a sound plan. The majority have been found unsound, been withdrawn or suspended for further work. Even more uniquely, we are one of only a handful of authorities to get through a housing target lower than the previous regional strategy figure and also be allowed to make up any shortfall over the whole plan period (rather than during the first five years).

This is a significant achievement and will help minimise loss of Green Belt while still providing an ambitious target to support the Council's growth agenda. It provides certainty for the development industry that Rotherham is a place to do business.

The key changes set out in the inspector's report are:

Housing numbers – the Inspector's initial view in January was that our housing target for the Plan period (2013-2028) should be increased to 17,133. This would have meant around 3,000 extra homes on Green Belt land. The Inspector has now been convinced by our further evidence that the target should revert to our original figure. This is 850 new homes per year, plus shortfall in delivery against that target spread across the Plan period. **This requires the Core Strategy to plan for a total of 14,371 new homes.** He has, however, recommended changes which commit us to produce an up-to-date Strategic Housing Market Assessment. We have started this work and are working closely with Sheffield City Council on the project.

Phasing of development sites – the changes delete any phasing of sites (i.e. which development sites should come forward first). This brings the Core Strategy into line with the National Planning Policy Framework. However, although it is not an overriding factor, it still allows us to take account of brownfield status when allocating sites for development.

Bassingthorpe Farm – is confirmed as a Strategic Allocation in the Core Strategy, allowing it to come forward ahead of other sites in the Sites & Policies document. This will allow new homes to come forward quicker to tackle our housing shortage.

Dinnington – the Council's preference for a Broad Location for Growth to the east of Dinnington is supported.

Affordable Housing – our 25% target is endorsed and some policy changes on commuted sums and viability are included. These clarify and strengthen the policy while exempting self-build developments from the requirements.

Waverley – is classed as a Principal Settlement in the Core Strategy settlement hierarchy, rather than as a Local Service Centre. This reflects the scale of development taking place.

Renewable and low carbon energy – the changes better align the Core Strategy with national policy and the move by Government to set future energy efficiency standards through national building regulations.

Infrastructure – the changes amend the Core Strategy to set up a mechanism to ensure the monitoring and delivery of the strategy and the timely provision of the infrastructure on which it depends.

Next steps

We cannot make any major changes to the Core Strategy at this stage; we can adopt it with the main modifications recommended by the inspector or decide to not

proceed with adoption. A decision not to adopt the Core Strategy would mean we have no up-to-date strategy or policies to decide on planning applications. This would risk us losing planning appeals on Green Belt land and would not allow us to decide where new homes and jobs should go. Without the Core Strategy in place we would be unable to provide certainty for residents, developers and investors, and would harm our ability to deliver on our strategic objectives.

Adoption Process

In line with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 adoption of the Core Strategy can only take place following resolution by Council.

As soon as practical after the Council adopts the Core Strategy we must comply with Regulations 26 and 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. These relate to the deposit of documents and publication arrangements. In line with these regulations we will make these documents available in our main office at Riverside House, and on our website:

- the adopted Core Strategy
- an adoption statement
- the inspector's report
- the Sustainability Appraisal report
- a Sustainability/Strategic Environmental Assessment adoption statement

We will also tell those who have previously requested to be kept informed the details of the adoption of the Core Strategy.

The adopted Core Strategy document will be made up of the Publication Core Strategy (2012), as amended by the Focused Changes to the Core Strategy (2013), the inspector's main modifications (2014) and a number of minor amendments set out in the Schedule of Minor Modifications (2014). Further minor amendments may also be necessary to ensure correction of typing errors, issues of formatting and so on.

The Core Strategy will be subject to a six week legal challenge period from the date of adoption, during which applications may be made to the High Court under Section 113 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 on the grounds that (a) the document is not within the appropriate power, or (b) a procedural requirement has not been complied with.

On adoption the Core Strategy will form part of the development plan for decision making and deciding on planning applications, and will replace some of the saved policies in the existing UDP. The remaining saved policies will be replaced by the subsequent Sites and Policies document.

8. Finance

Adoption of the Core Strategy will incur some costs related to notification of adoption and printing costs which will be met from the existing Planning Policy budget.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

- The Localism Act and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) express a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development. Our UDP policies only continue to have any weight where they are in accordance with the NPPF. 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, encourage inward investment 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 town, district and local centres within the borough.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Inspector's Report including recommended Main Modifications

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/corestrategyexamination/downloads/file/557/rotherham_core_strategy_inspectors_report_and_appendix

Publication Core Strategy (2012)

<http://rotherham.limehouse.co.uk/file/2210054>

Focused Changes to the Core Strategy (2013)

<http://rotherham.limehouse.co.uk/file/2383011>

Schedule of Minor Modifications (2014)
<http://rotherham.limehouse.co.uk/file/2821806>

Contact name:

Andy Duncan, Planning Policy Manager
01709 823830, andy.duncan@rotherham.gov.uk

Ryan Shepherd, Senior Planning Officer
01709 823888, ryan.shepherd@rotherham.gov.uk