

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member and Advisers for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Friday 13 February 2015</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Local Plan Evidence Base: Joint Sheffield and Rotherham Employment Land Review</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Environment and Development Services</b>

### 5. Summary

This report seeks an exemption from Standing Orders 47.6.2 and 47.6.3 to allow the appointment of consultants Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners to undertake a Joint Sheffield and Rotherham Employment Land Review.

### 6. Recommendations

That Cabinet Member approves the exempting of the proposed appointment of Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners to undertake a Joint Sheffield and Rotherham Employment Land Review, from Standing Orders 47.6.2 (requirement to invite at least two oral or written quotations for contracts with an estimated value of £5,000 but less than £20,000) and 47.6.3 (requirement to invite at least three written quotes for contracts with a value of between £20,000 and £50,000).

## 7. Proposals and Details

In preparing its Local Plan the Council must ensure that it is based on an up to date and robust evidence base. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) indicates at paragraph 158 that:

*“Each local planning authority should ensure that the Local Plan is based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. Local planning authorities should ensure that their assessment of and strategies for housing, employment and other uses are integrated, and that they take full account of relevant market and economic signals”*

In relation to business it also identifies the importance of having a clear understanding of business needs within the economic markets operating in and across their area. It highlights that Local Authorities should work with neighbouring authorities and with Local Enterprise Partnerships to prepare and maintain a robust evidence base to understand both existing business needs and likely changes in the market (paragraph 160).

In light of the Localism Act, the NPPF at paragraph 181 identifies that

*“Local planning authorities will be expected to demonstrate evidence of having effectively cooperated to plan for issues with cross-boundary impacts when their Local Plans are submitted for examination”*

Rotherham’s key employment and business evidence base which supported preparation of the Core Strategy is the 2010 Employment Land Review, which was produced in-house. This is now becoming out of date and it is necessary to update the document in order to ensure that the Publication Sites and Policies document is based on robust evidence.

The opportunity has arisen to work with Sheffield to update their 2013 Employment Land Review, which would be expanded to include data, analysis and assessment for Rotherham in addition to Sheffield. Both Councils require robust evidence base regarding employment land, as outlined above. In compliance with the NPPF, this would provide a joint evidence base across Rotherham and Sheffield, which has been previously identified as a single economic area.

Sheffield City Council is considering (subject to Member approval) appointment of Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners to update the 2013 Employment Land Review which the consultants prepared for them.

Rotherham also requires its Employment Land Review evidence to be updated. Whilst previous work has been undertaken in-house there are not presently the resources available to complete any update in the timeframe required to support Publication and subsequent submission of the Sites and Policies document.

The employment Land Review is required to support the preparation of the Publication Sites and Policies document. As set out below it is considered that the approach above represents a cost effective approach which delivers further benefits to the Council.

A joint Employment Land Review would provide benefits for the Council by contributing to joint working with Sheffield City Council. This will help ensure that we are meeting our Duty to Co-operate (as set out in the Localism Act) on cross boundary issues. This is a key area on which the Sites and Policies document will be judged at examination.

This approach would have the following benefits:

- Spreading costs between the two authorities
- There will be significant economies of scale for the same consultancy to undertake this further work, particularly given the tight timeframe for completion of the study to support the Publication Sites and Policies document.
- The cost of adding Rotherham to the Joint Employment Land Review would be significantly less than commissioning an individual Employment Land Review for Rotherham.
- Production of a single, joint evidence base document which covers the recognised single economic area of Sheffield and Rotherham

## **8. Finance**

The total cost of services required from Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners is currently being negotiated with the consultants and with Sheffield City Council and is dependent on the amount of work required to be undertaken to ensure the robustness of the study.

The cost of the study for Rotherham is envisaged to be a maximum of £15,000. The cost will be met from the Planning Policy budget

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties**

Due to the technical nature of this work, and the fact that Sheffield require only a limited update of their evidence base, a request to another consultancy to undertake the work would incur significant additional time requirements and costs derived from reading and taking forward previous Employment Land Review work. To appoint another consultant, who will be expected to modify and amend an earlier consultants' work, would require the new consultancy to fully understand the original data and decision-making. This could potentially impact on the timing and subsequent Publication and submission of the Sites and Policies document to Central Government

Seeking quotations may also limit the potential opportunity to deliver a joint Employment Land Review with Sheffield based on consistent methodology, data and analysis; the result would be the need to commission a single Employment Land Review for Rotherham which it is considered would be more costly than the present option.

The absence of an up to date evidence base to support submission of the Sites and Policies document could risk the suspension of any future examination to undertake further work or, as a worst case, the Sites and Policies document being found unsound.

Whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012) has reinforced the presumption in favour of sustainable development, the need for an up to date spatial plan is paramount in decision-making; the NPPF states (paragraph 14):

“At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking....

For decision taking this means<sup>1</sup>:

- Where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting planning permission unless:
  - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or
  - specific policies in this framework indicate development should be restricted.”

If an adopted development plan is not put in place quickly this may require the Council to consider and grant planning applications for major (Greenfield) development that have not been examined in the Local Plan. This approach could be contrary to our priorities, aspirations or locational preferences.

#### **10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications**

The appointment of consultants as proposed above will enable the Council to adhere to its timetable for preparation and submission of the Sites and Policies document.

#### **11. Background Papers and Consultation**

Consultation on this report has been undertaken with the Council’s legal and financial programme areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless material considerations indicate otherwise