

CABINET

DATE: 21 MARCH 2016

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## **NORTHUMBERLAND CORE STRATEGY UPDATE**

### **Report of the Chief Executive**

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Allan Hepple - Economic Growth

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### **Purpose of Report**

To update Members on the preparation of the Northumberland Core Strategy particularly:

- Key feedback from the consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Plan; and
- Next steps for the preparation of the Northumberland Core Strategy.

### **Recommendations**

**It is recommended that Cabinet:**

- **Note the issues highlighted in the report;**
- **Agree the revised timetable for the preparation of the Northumberland Core Strategy; and**
- **Approve the revised Local Development Scheme (Appendix A) for publication and delegates authority to the Director of Planning and Economy, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, to update the Local Development Scheme annually.**

### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is particularly relevant to the Economic Growth, Places and Environment and Stronger Communities and Families priorities of the Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2013 to 2017.

### **Key issues**

1. The consultation on the Pre-Submission Draft Core Strategy took place between 14 October 2015 and 25 November 2015. During the consultation period:
  - Almost 1,850 comments were received from almost 400 respondents;
  - 23 drop-in sessions were held - attended by around 1,895 people;
  - Officers attended 5 other sessions requested by organisations/ bodies.

2. In examining the responses received to the consultation, a number of issues and areas of concern with the Pre Submission Core Strategy document have arisen, some of which could not be fully resolved prior to consultation on the Pre Submission Draft Plan.
3. In order to address the areas of concern and the comments received through the consultation process, it is considered there will be the need to make changes to the Core Strategy prior to submission requiring a further consultation on major modifications. The following revised draft timetable for the Core Strategy is therefore being proposed:
  - Major Modifications Document to Cabinet : May 2016
  - 6 week consultation on Major Modifications : June - July 2016
  - Cabinet : October 2016
  - Full Council : November 2016
  - Submission of Core Strategy for Examination : December 2016
  - Examination : Spring 2017
  - Adoption : Summer 2017
4. This revised timetable would allow the Council to fully review the representations made to the Core Strategy Pre Submission consultation, undertake further work to address areas of risk and make policy changes; and allow for additional time to seek to resolve outstanding objections in order to submit a more robust plan for examination.

## **Background**

1. This report provides an update on key elements of the preparation of the Core Strategy. The key issues identified have been discussed by the LDF Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) on 19 January 2016 and were also considered by Risk Appraisal Panel on 4 February 2016.
2. The Northumberland Core Strategy Pre Submission Draft Plan consultation ran for a period of six weeks commencing on 14 October 2015 and closing on 25 November 2015. In accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 this consultation was designed to seek views on whether the Plan is 'sound' prior to submission to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination. For this stage responses needed to be based around the 'Tests of Soundness' that require the Core Strategy to be 'Positively Prepared', 'Justified', 'Effective' and consistent with national policy.
3. Almost 1,850 comments were received from almost 400 respondents to the Pre-Submission Draft Plan consultation and consultation events were attended by almost 1,895 people. The level of feedback was a lot less than the last consultation on the Core Strategy. By comparison:
  - The Full Draft Plan consultation received approximately 9,200 comments from almost 1,300 respondents;
  - The Preferred Options Stage 2 consultation received almost 12,300 comments from almost 2,000 people;

- The Preferred Options Stage 1 consultation received almost 4,500 comments from over 600 people;
  - The Issues and Options consultation received around 12,600 comments from around 1,100 people.
4. It is hoped that the reduction in the level of comments and respondents is an indication that the Council has made changes to reflect previous feedback. It may also reflect the nature of the consultation this time around which asked for specific comments on the soundness or legal compliance of the Plan. In addition, a number of groups which shared a common view have sent in group representations, including petitions rather than multiple copies, as requested by the Council.
5. An additional consultation was also undertaken on the South East Ponteland Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) during the same period. Around 1,400 comments were received from almost 400 respondents and interest groups, including group representations and petitions. The responses received on the SPD have been inputted into the online database system and are currently being analysed.

### **Key Issues from Pre-Submission Core Strategy consultation**

6. The key issues from the consultation are summarised below. It should be recognised that given the level of comments received not all issues are included in this report. All comments received through the consultation are however available for viewing on the Council's website.

#### *Strategic approach*

- Challenges made in relation to the Duty to Cooperate process and further information and clarity required;
- Number of challenges made in relation to the Plan's evidence base;
- Concern from some local communities and interest groups that all Council's in the North East are seeking to redress their demographic balance in competition with each other and that this will require significant in-migration from outside the North East. Also a need for clarity over the relationship with adjoining authorities in terms of calculation of the objectively assessed housing need;
- Concerns from Town Councils and local residents in Hexham and Ponteland regarding the introduction of information and proposals this late in the day and the inflexible nature of consultation this time around;
- Concerns from some house builders that there is inadequate viability evidence for focusing the majoring of development in the South East Delivery Area and more emphasis should be placed on Central Delivery Area; and
- Objections to the reclassification of Ponteland as a Main Town.

#### *Delivering a thriving and competitive economy*

- Challenges to the 10,000 jobs figure, with several respondents arguing that the figure is aspirational and is not substantiated by evidence and does not sufficiently justify the housing figure, whilst others argue that the figure is not aspirational enough;

- Challenges to the methodology used to forecast employment land need and the process used for deallocation of employment land; as well as the allocation and deallocation of specific sites and the safeguarding of employment land;
- Issue of flexibility may be required in relation West Hartford employment site;
- Broad support for the identification of the Blyth Estuary Strategic Employment Area, although challenges to the deallocation of specific areas;
- Broad support for the inclusion of a windfall employment policy and home run businesses;
- Concern that the rural economy policy wording has been amended to exclude reference to the need for the development of new residential and commercial buildings;
- Concern that the tourism policy introduces a sequential approach to development and is not in accordance with NPPF;
- Confusion as to why the retail hierarchy is not consistent with the spatial distribution policy; and
- Questions raised on the locally set threshold for the impact test without the updated retail study.

*Providing existing and future communities with a choice of a decent, affordable home*

- Housing provision - developers consider the housing requirement should be increased; conversely communities (in some areas of the County) would like to see the numbers lowered;
- Challenges made to the assumptions that have informed the assessment of objectively assessed need and the justification for the proposed distribution;
- Broad support for the identification of strategic sites, however concern from developers that the Core Strategy should be specifically allocating more housing sites and a number of additional sites have been suggested;
- Challenge to approach to the Council's five year housing land supply;
- Objections to the reduction of the affordable housing requirement as well as on-going concern from the development industry over the evidence for the affordable homes target and the impact on viability in some parts of the County;
- Approach to rural exceptions sites was largely supported, as was the approach to housing for older people and vulnerable groups.

*Green Belt*

- Objectors consider that exceptional circumstances have not been demonstrated to remove sites from the Green Belt whilst developers consider that the plan does not propose to release sufficient quantities of land to ensure objectively assessed housing needs can be met. Developers suggest that additional Green Belt releases are required for the Plan period and for safeguarded land. A number of alternative/additional Green Belt release sites have been put forward for Main Towns, Service Centres and the smaller settlements across the County;
- Hexham - Objection from residents to both safeguarding land and deleting any Green Belt due to over inflated population projections. Covenant has been identified on one of the Council owned sites preventing development. Objection from developers that the sites proposed to be removed from the Green Belt do not provide sufficient quantity of land required and are not deliverable and

alternative and/or additional sites have been identified for removal from the Green Belt;

- Ponteland - Significant objection from local communities who consider there is no need to delete land from the Green Belt to deliver the level of development proposed. Communities also do not agree with the assessment that the land to the south east of Ponteland is the area of least impact and that Green Belt deletion is not required to rebuild schools and leisure facilities. Objection from developers who's sites are not proposed to be released from the Green Belt;
- Prudhoe - Objections on the basis that the consultation on the last minute change from Beaumont Way to Highfield Lane has been inadequate; concern that the Highfield Lane allocation will affect the character of the area and the infrastructure cannot support the additional houses;
- Requirement for further justification for the identification of safeguarded land;
- A number of comments propose that the Green Belt around Morpeth is a new Green Belt and needs to be justified by exceptional circumstances in the Core Strategy.
- Morpeth - Developers/landowners consider that insufficient sites have been identified for release from the Green Belt during the Plan period and have identified alternative and/or additional sites for development that should not be included in the Green Belt; and
- Smaller settlements - Objections have been received to a number of the insets on the basis that additional land should be released to meet requirements and allow settlements to evolve and to be sustainable. Insets for other settlements have also been requested.

*Conserving and enhancing Northumberland's distinctive and valued natural, historic, water and built environments*

- Overall support for the approach within the chapter, with some policy amendments suggested to strengthen/ clarify elements of policies and to ensure policies are NPPF compliant; and
- Request for Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site and buffer zone to have own discrete policy.

*Ensuring connectivity and infrastructure delivery*

- Concerns raised over the impact of developments on the A1, A19, A69 and A696 and need for additional evidence base work to model cumulative impact of development on the road network required;
- General support for promoting sustainable connections but concern that this is not reflected through later policies which relate primarily to motorised traffic;
- Support for dualling of A1 and A69 however some concerns regarding ability to safeguard lines as the lines of routes have not yet been identified; and
- Request that land at Newcastle Airport which is designated for "airport uses" is allocated for "uses which would benefit from clustering around the airport".

### *Community well-being*

- General support for the approach with some policy amendments suggested to strengthen/ clarify elements of policies and to ensure policies are NPPF compliant.

### *Managing natural resources*

- General support for minerals and waste policies with some policy amendments suggested to strengthen or clarify elements of the policies and to ensure policies are NPPF compliant; and
- Objections that renewable energy and wind farm policies do not adequately address the Secretary of State's Written Ministerial Statement on wind energy development.

### *Implementation*

- Implementation policy should provide clarity on when land acquisitions and compulsory purchase powers will be required;
- Comments that the Infrastructure Delivery Plan is not finalised and there is a lack of detail on specific requirements for individual settlements;
- Objections to the Viability Assessment; considered to lack justification and is not effective in that it will threaten development viability, and is not in accordance with NPPF; and
- Policy on planning conditions and obligations is not necessary as it repeats national policy.

### **Next Steps**

7. In examining the responses received to the consultation a number of issues and areas of concern with the Pre Submission Core Strategy document have arisen, some of which could not be fully resolved prior to consultation on the Pre Submission Draft Plan including:

- Proposals for Hexham:
  - There is not the capacity to deliver the housing numbers on the small sites proposed to be removed from the Green Belt. A covenant has been identified on one of the Council owned sites preventing development from coming forward; and
  - There is a requirement for additional employment land in Hexham and there may be delivery issues with the site identified within the Pre Submission Core Strategy.
- Proposed approach to Green Belt boundaries around smaller settlements - The Pre Submission Draft Plan was the first time inset boundaries had been proposed. Although alternatives have been discussed with Town and Parish Councils there had been no official public consultation on alternatives and there is the need to re-examine the proposed approach in relation to some settlements.

- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment - An interim SHLAA was published alongside the Pre Submission Draft Core Strategy. The SHLAA needs to be finalised for Submission stage and agreed by the SHLAA Panel.
- Details of the education and leisure proposals for Ponteland to be finalised.
- Wind farm policy - Need to amend the policy to reflect the ministerial statement/ updated national planning practice guidance (NPPG)
- On-going discussions with Highways England in relation to the potential impact of developments on the A1, A19 and A69.
- On-going discussions with the Homes & Communities Agency regarding the deliverability of the West Hartford employment site.
- Initial findings of the retail study update are suggesting a need for additional retail development which may cause a potential issue in areas requiring changes to the Green Belt (Morpeth and Hexham)
- Duty to Cooperate - On-going discussions with neighbouring authorities.

8. The current Local Development Scheme identifies that the Council would submit the Core Strategy for public examination in March 2016. However, in order to address the areas of concern highlighted above, and the comments received through the consultation process, it is considered there will be the need to make changes to the Core Strategy prior to submission requiring a further consultation on major modifications. The following revised draft timetable for the Core Strategy is therefore being proposed:

- Major Modifications Document to Cabinet : May 2016
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9. This revised timetable would allow the Council to fully review the representations made to the Core Strategy Pre Submission consultation, undertake further work to address areas of risk and make policy changes; and allow for additional time to seek to resolve outstanding objections in order to submit a more robust plan for examination. The Local Development Scheme has been updated to reflect the changes to the timetable set out above and is attached at Appendix A.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	The Core Strategy when adopted will form part of the Council's policy framework.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Plan preparation costs will be met from within existing Council's budgets.
<b>Legal</b>	Local planning authorities must prepare a Local Plan which sets planning policies in a local authority area. Local plans must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy in accordance with section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the National Planning Policy Framework.
<b>Procurement</b>	None
<b>Human Resources</b>	Work on the Core Strategy involves both Council Officers and Members.
<b>Property</b>	The adopted Core Strategy will apply to land and buildings owned by the County Council as they apply to land and buildings owned by others.
<b>Equalities (Impact Assessment attached)</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Previous drafts of the Core Strategy have been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. An updated Equality Assessment will be published alongside the Submission Core Strategy document.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	The preparation of the Northumberland Local Plan has been the subject of a risk assessment.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	Crime and disorder considerations will be taken into account in the preparation of the Core Strategy.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	The Core Strategy once adopted will bring together and supersede many planning policies from the former County and District Council planning documents into a single document, ensuring consistency in planning policies across the County and thereby making it easier for the public to understand.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	The emerging Northumberland Core Strategy includes draft policy approaches relating to climate change and carbon reduction.
<b>Wards</b>	All



## **Background papers**

- Core Strategy Issues and Options (May 2012)
- Core Strategy Preferred Options Stage 1 (February 2013)
- Core Strategy Preferred Options Stage 2 - Housing, Employment and Green Belt consultation document (October 2013)
- Core Strategy Full Draft Plan (December 2014)
- Core Strategy Pre Submission Draft Plan (October 2015)

## **Report sign off**

Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Executive Director	GP
Portfolio Holder(s)	AH

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