

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panel
DATE: 24 April 2008

RE: Black Country Joint Core Strategy Development Plan Document

Purpose

To update Members on the progress of developing the Black Country Joint Core Strategy Development Plan document and the key outcomes of the consultations undertaken to date and to explain what happens next in terms of its production.

The Joint Core Strategy Context

Officers commenced work on producing the Black Country Joint Core Strategy in late 2006. This will be a spatial development plan and will form the basis of the council's Local Development Framework (LDF). It is being prepared jointly with the boroughs of Dudley and Sandwell and the City of Wolverhampton and its remit will cover the whole of the Black Country, including Walsall.

The LDF will, on a stage by stage basis, replace the Walsall Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as the development plan for the borough, and the Joint Core Strategy will be the document that will provide a framework of strategic planning policies. Joint preparation of the document will mean that a common set of strategic policies should be applied consistently across the whole of the Black Country on a basis that will have been agreed by all four of the local authorities.

The Joint Core Strategy will set out the vision, objectives and spatial strategy for the future development of the Borough, taking account of the wider Black Country context. It will contain the key strategic policies that will form a link between the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and the more detailed Local Development Plan Documents, which together comprise the LDF. There will be close links to the Sustainable Community Strategy so the spatial and community visions for the borough should support each other. Whilst the Joint Core Strategy is limited to spatial issues, it will not allocate specific locations for development or include detailed specific policies.

The Joint Core Strategy is being produced over a three year period through four main production stages:

- **Stage One:** the 'frontloading' stage; working with key stakeholders to scope out the objectives of the Joint Core Strategy and identify issues and evidence.
- **Stage Two:** using the results of 'frontloading' to develop a series of options for the Joint Core Strategy and selecting preferred options to take the strategy forward.
- **Stage Three:** undertaking further consultation with stakeholders to prepare a final version of the Joint Core Strategy which will be submitted to the Secretary of State for an independent examination into its 'soundness'.
- **Stage Four:** following receipt of the inspector's binding report the Joint Core Strategy will be adopted by the 4 Black Country local authorities.

The timetable for producing the Joint Core Strategy has been agreed by the 4 Black Country Local Authorities and endorsed by the Government Office for the West Midlands and the Planning Inspectorate and is set out overleaf.

Stage	Dates
Commencement & Frontloading	December 2006-May 2007
Reg 25 (Issues & Options)	July 2007
Reg 26 (Preferred Option)	March 2008
Submission	October 2008
Pre-Examination Meeting	February 2009
Examination Begins	April 2009
Adoption	October 2009

Consultation undertaken to date

Since December 2006, officers from the 4 local authorities have undertaken consultation to obtain people's opinions on the different stages of the Core Strategy's production. Walsall Council, in partnership with its three Black Country neighbours, has been encouraging as many people as possible to have their say.

During Summer 2007, an Issues and Options document was produced which was subject to a 6 week period consultation between June-August. The document set out the issues, identified at the previous stage of consultation, facing the Black Country; and proposed options for the Core Strategy to address these issues. The document proposed focussing new development, for housing and/or industry into a series of 'Regeneration Corridors' whilst directing investment in retail, leisure and offices within the 4 Black Country strategic centres, including Walsall Town Centre. It also sought views on two broad spatial options for delivering the development:

- Option 1:** concentrating housing development in the parts of the corridors most accessible by public transport, and the protection of the remaining land for local employment, whilst
- Option 2:** proposed more spread out development throughout the corridors, which would allow a greater range of housing types and sizes to be provided but would result in the loss of more local employment land.

In addition, the document sought the opinion on the options for delivering the development whilst securing environmental improvements, safeguarding local character, improving accessibility and improving the economy of the Black Country.

During the consultation period officers held discussions with key stakeholders. This was complemented by a series of local consultation events around Walsall, in partnership with Walsall Community Empowerment Network (CEN). This was accompanied by briefings to update Walsall Council Members on its production.

The issues identified in the consultation as being most important to people are:

- Supplying sufficient land for jobs and a range of house types and densities
- Ensure there is an adequate supply of affordable housing across the Black Country
- Providing a full range of facilities in centres, not just shops

- Better integration of transport issues with the strategy for development in the Black Country including delivering better quality public transport in more places
- Effective planning for waste including using waste as a resource
- Education and improving skills and training for people in the Black Country
- Maintaining and enhancing natural green space
- Tackling the causes and effects of climate change

The results of this consultation, together with the outcomes of technical evidence gathering, an accompanying Sustainability Appraisal process and engagement with key stakeholders and delivery partners were analysed by officers to prepare a series of preferred options for the strategy. Since then, a preferred options document has been produced, and this is the subject of current consultation (see below). This sets out in more detail a preferred spatial strategy for shaping the development of the Black Country up to 2026. It proposes potential policy areas for helping make decisions on future major development proposals and broad locations for new development, especially for how the Regeneration Corridors will be developed for new employment and housing supported by infrastructure improvements and new facilities. In addition, the document sets out how future development for new retail, leisure and offices will be accommodated within the 4 strategic centres. Outside the corridors, the document sets out how the positive aspects of the natural and built environment (including existing housing areas and centres) will be protected and enhanced.

The key issues contained within the Preferred Options document are:

- The general location of approximately 13,000 net new houses in Walsall by 2026, with questions seeking views on the level of provision for affordable housing
- The general location of high quality and local employment land within Walsall to support the local economy
- Policies to emphasise the importance of Walsall Town Centre in terms of future leisure, retail and office development, whilst seeking to protect and enhance each of the borough's district and local centres to meet more local needs.
- Policies that will deliver a high quality environment, protect and enhance local character and distinctiveness whilst promoting renewable energy and sustainable and energy efficient construction techniques.
- Approaches to safeguard the Black Country's mineral resources and provide an appropriate number of sites for waste management facilities
- Approaches to ensure that community facilities are located in accessible locations
- Policies to ensure that adequate infrastructure, including transport needs, is in place to support the amount of development proposed.

Next steps in producing the Joint Core Strategy

The Preferred Options Document is subject to a statutory 6 week consultation period between 17th March and 28th April 2008. To date, Walsall Officers have been organising local consultation events with key stakeholders. This has included attending LNP meetings and holding 'drop in' sessions across the borough. Walsall Officers have undertaken briefings with members during March 08 and consultation material has been widely distributed to Members in addition to organisations and individuals on the LDF database and to all libraries.

After the consultation period has ended, officers from the four Black Country local authorities will be using the consultation responses received to produce a Submission Joint Core Strategy document. It is anticipated that following Cabinet and Council approval, the

submission document will be submitted to the Secretary of State for examination during October 2008. It will be accompanied by a further 6 week consultation period. A member-officer working group has been formed in Walsall to bring representatives of each of the political parties together with the officers working on the plan.

Recommendations

That:

a) the progress and current consultation on the Joint Core Strategy be noted;

and;

b) Members consider whether or not they wish to consider the Black Country Joint Core Strategy Development Plan Document prior to development of the final documentation for Submission to Secretary of State, currently programmed for October 2008.

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