

28 February, 2013

Introduction to the Site Allocation Document (SAD) and Town Centre Area Action Planning (AAP) – Walsall Local Development Framework.

Ward(s): The Site Allocations Document covers all wards in the Borough. The Town Centre is located primarily in St Matthews, but extends into small parts of Pleck, Birchills-Leamore and Blakenall Wards

Portfolios: Cllr A Andrew- Regeneration

Executive Summary:

This report is to:

- a) introduce a presentation for Members on the SAD and AAP processes; and
- b) ask Members to establish a Working Group to steer the work on the plans.

Reason for scrutiny:

The production of plans to allocate land for development and designate sites for protection will be a major project that will have implications across the borough. Whilst formal approval of statutory plans will be by Cabinet and ultimately by Council, it is considered that Members should be involved in the detailed work on a basis that enables a wide range of perspectives.

Recommendation:

That the Panel nominates Members for a Working Group reflecting, insofar as possible, the interests of all areas of the borough and the widest political representation, to help guide and steer the work on the plans.

Background papers (all published):

- Black Country Core Strategy
- Black Country Core Strategy Inspectors Report
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Resource and legal considerations:

Cabinet has agreed previously that funding from New Homes Bonus should be used to help plan for future development. At present a sum of £171,000 is available for work on the plans, which should be sufficient to take the work as far as the publication stage – although funding is likely to be needed in future for the Public Examination and adoption stages.

To have statutory force, the plans have to be prepared in accordance with EU Directives (on Strategic Environmental Assessment and on Habitats) and national legislation and policy (especially the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2008(as amended), the Local Planning Regulations 2012 and the NPPF). They should also be consistent with the Black Country Core Strategy. The preparation process includes requirements for assessment and consultations, and the plans will be subject to examination by a Planning Inspector.

Citizen impact:

The allocation of sites for development, including for housing and employment, will help to provide the homes, jobs and other facilities needed for the future. At the same time, the designation of sites for protection, for example for open space, nature and /or as Green Belt, should help to maintain local quality of life.

The plans will need to balance such issues and the process is likely to generate considerable interest and potential controversy.

Environmental impact:

The plans will seek to protect and enhance the environment at the same time as accommodating development and promoting regeneration. In doing this they will take account of a wide range of environmental issues, including, for example, ground conditions, air quality, water supply drainage, flooding and the water environment, accessibility and the effect on the need to travel, nature conservation and the historic environment. The process will be informed by a sustainability appraisal and a habitats assessment.

Performance management:

The preparation of the plans is a major project that is subject to project planning and reported through managers in the Regeneration Directorate, as well as to the Corporate Management Team at key points. Whilst the formal process requires decisions by Cabinet and the ultimate adoption of the plan by Full Council, it is considered that on-going Member involvement will help ensure more robust plan-making.

The preparation of the plans must follow a statutory process from the outset and this includes a formal examination to ensure they are 'sound'.

Equality Implications:

The aims of the plans follow those of the Black Country Core Strategy to regenerate the area and to give all sections of the community improved access to opportunities in an improved environment. The sustainability appraisal work, which runs right through the plan-making, includes an Equality Impact Assessment.

Consultation:

Since Cabinet (in 2011) approved the start of work on the plans, officers have already consulted on a scoping report for the sustainability appraisal and have issued a 'call for sites' from anyone who wants to propose development. The preparation process includes statutory periods for consultation, the first of which (on 'Issues and 'Options') is proposed to start this Spring, although informal discussions can take place at any time (provided this would not derail the preparation programme). The council and other local authorities and certain public bodies such as the Environment Agency and the ITA are subject to the Duty to Co-operate, which requires constructive engagement on an on-going basis.

A consultation plan has been prepared, to schedule of events and discussions with a wide range of interest groups.

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