

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27 JUNE 2016

Title:

WAVERLEY BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN PART 1: STRATEGIC POLICIES AND SITES – PRE-SUBMISSION DRAFT

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Brian Adams]
[Wards Affected: ALL]

Summary and purpose:

The new Waverley Borough Local Plan Part 1 has reached a key stage in its development. The purpose of this report is to seek comments on the proposed submission version of Local Plan Part 1. The report summarises the evolution of the Plan and its key contents as well as explaining the process going forward. It also includes details of the most recent consultation on the emerging Plan and how this has informed the development of the pre-submission Plan.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

The Waverley Borough Local Plan and its policies will have an important role in supporting and delivering Corporate Priorities, including protecting and enhancing the environment of Waverley and delivering affordable housing.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising specifically from this report.

Legal Implications

It will be necessary to ensure that when the Local Plan is submitted for Examination, it complies with the relevant legal tests of soundness.

Introduction

1. The Local Plan Part 1 sets out the key policies and overall strategy for managing and directing future development in Waverley over the period to 2032. The Plan has reached the stage where it is ready to be published in its pre-submission form. Subject to Council approval, therefore, the intention will be to formally publish the plan, which will trigger a period for representations to be made on the Plan, before it is submitted for Examination by a Planning Inspector.

2. At this stage, the Plan is a draft document, which will be subject to input from both the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Local Plan Special Interest Group (which has been constituted to support development of the Local Plan). This input will be fed into the Executive when it meets to consider the draft Plan.

Background

- 3 The Plan has its origins in the Core Strategy, which was originally submitted for Examination in 2013. However, as Members will be aware, the Core Strategy was subsequently withdrawn from Examination on the recommendation of the Inspector. In the light of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which had been published in 2012, the Inspector was of the view that the Council should update its evidence on housing need and should cease relying on a housing target that had been derived from the now revoked South East Plan.
4. Although the Core Strategy was withdrawn from Examination, it is not the case that the Council had to start from scratch with a new Plan. The Core Strategy was developed after a number of consultations and was underpinned by an extensive evidence base, culminating in the development of key policies on matters such as the role of town centres, delivery of affordable homes, and employment. Many of these Core Strategy policies have been updated, including updates to the evidence where necessary, but have not had to be changed significantly in order to remain consistent with national policy in the NPPF.
5. The focus of work in developing the new Local Plan has been to update the evidence of housing need and to develop the most appropriate strategy for both the number and distribution of new homes. This has clearly had implications for other strands of work, including developing and updating the evidence on the availability of land, updating the evidence on infrastructure capacity and future delivery and reviewing the implications of delivering more housing on the various constraints that affect Waverley.

The Evidence Base

6. An extensive evidence base has been developed to support the new Local Plan. Much of this is already complete and published on the Council's website. One of the key documents is the West Surrey Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). This sets out the objectively assessed need (OAN) for new homes within each of the local authorities that make up the West Surrey Housing Market Area (HMA) (Guildford, Woking and Waverley). In Waverley's case the OAN is equivalent to 519 homes per annum.
7. Other key evidence includes the Employment Land Review, the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, the Land Availability Assessment (LAA), the Green Belt Review (Parts 1 and 2) and various evidence documents relating to transport infrastructure. Some of these documents have already

been published and others will be published alongside the Plan to support the pre-submission consultation.

National Policy Framework

8. A key test of the soundness of the Plan will be whether it is consistent with national planning policy. This is mainly set out in the NPPF. A key requirement of the NPPF is that Local Plans should meet the objectively assessed needs, which for Waverley is 519 homes per annum, unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole; or unless specific policies in the NPPF indicate that development should be restricted.
9. In the light of the above, the expectation is that through their local plans councils should be seeking to meet the identified needs for development in full, unless there are very good reasons for not doing so. In Waverley's case, therefore, the expectation is that the Council should be meeting its need for new homes (519 a year). Much of the work undertaken on the new plan has been to consider whether there are any reasons why Waverley cannot meet its needs in full. This has meant considering all the key factors that may impact on the Council's ability to meet its identified needs. These include the implications of some of the European sites such as the Special Protection Areas, the land use and landscape constraints such as the Green Belt and the Area of Outstanding Natural beauty (AONB), physical constraints such as flooding and the capacity of infrastructure, including transport, to accommodate development.

Consultation on Housing Scenarios and Other Issues

10. In September/October 2014, the Council consulted on four potential housing scenarios as well as other issues for the emerging Local Plan. At that time, the draft SHMA identified a need for 470 homes a year. Four alternative scenarios were presented for the broad distribution of new homes, each delivering the equivalent of 470 homes a year. One of the scenarios did not have any new housing proposed at Dunsfold Aerodrome, the other three included various levels of growth at Dunsfold Aerodrome (1,800, 2,600 and 3,400). These are the levels of growth promoted by the site owners. The consultation also included a number of questions on other issues relevant to the emerging Local Plan. These included questions on the findings of the Green Belt Review, the approach regarding landscape designations and the approach regarding existing and new employment sites.
11. The outcomes from that consultation were reported to the Executive in March 2015. The consultation had attracted over 4,000 responses. Based on those who responded to the consultation, there was overwhelming support for the scenario that included the maximum amount of development at Dunsfold Aerodrome. Attached as Annexe 1 to this report is a summary of the outcome from the consultation and a response to the issues raised, including those

from some of the key stakeholders, indicating how they have informed the development of the draft Plan.

12. In addition to this main consultation, there have been various other opportunities to liaise with key stakeholders during the development of the Plan. These included meetings with town and parish councils, liaison on emerging neighbourhood plans, discussions with key neighbouring authorities and liaison with key consultees such as Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Main components of the Draft Local Plan Part 1

13. As explained above, Local Plan Part 1 deals with key strategic policies and the allocation of Strategic Sites. Attached as Annexe 2 is the draft pre-submission plan. A key part of the Plan is the Spatial Strategy. This sets out the broad approach to the location of development. This has been developed taking account of three key factors:-
 - The Settlement Hierarchy
 - The landscape and other physical, policy and ecological constraints
 - The potential availability of sites to deliver the strategy
14. The Council's strategy seeks to avoid development on land of the highest amenity value and to safeguard the Green Belt. It seeks to focus development in/around the main settlements, taking account of the constraints outlined above. It allows for moderate growth in some of the larger villages and lower levels of growth in villages further down the Settlement Hierarchy. It also seeks to maximise the use of suitable brownfield land. In some cases, it has been necessary to balance these considerations. For example, the Dunsfold Aerodrome site is not as well related to existing services and facilities as other potential development locations, but it is a significant brownfield site.
15. The number and distribution of new homes is another key part of the Plan, and these are closely linked to the Spatial Strategy. The Plan seeks to deliver at least 9,861 additional homes over the Plan period from 2013 to 2032 (equivalent to 519 homes a year). The Plan also sets out the distribution of these homes with an allocation for each settlement with the exception of the smallest villages. A major element of the Plan is the allocation of the Dunsfold Aerodrome site for a new settlement of up to 2,600 homes. It is acknowledged that in the 2014 consultation the housing scenario most favoured by those who responded was the one including 3,400 homes at Dunsfold Aerodrome. In considering the role that Dunsfold Aerodrome could make to meeting housing requirements, account has been taken of a number of factors, including the amount of development that can reasonably be delivered in the Plan period.
16. It is also acknowledged that planning permission has previously been turned down on appeal for a new settlement at Dunsfold Aerodrome.

However, officers consider that matters have moved on since 2009. National Planning Policy has changed significantly since 2009 with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the expectation that councils should be planning to meet their identified housing needs in full. This means that the Council is having to consider delivering considerably more new homes than was the case in 2009. It is recognised, however, that there are concerns about the impact of a new settlement upon this site on local infrastructure, particularly the road network. On the other hand, this is a significant brownfield site and its development would be supported by on-site services and facilities and off-site improvements to infrastructure. In addition, the NPPF definition of 'sustainable development' goes beyond the location of development and incorporates economic, social and environmental considerations. The inclusion of the site as a major allocation in the Plan is still subject to the provision of appropriate infrastructure to mitigate the impact of development, particularly improvements to the road network. Some work has already taken place to assess the impact of growth on the road network, including the consideration of possible mitigation at key locations on the A281.

17. Members will be aware of the related planning application for the development of Dunsfold Aerodrome site with 1,800 homes and related facilities. That application is currently on hold pending the receipt and consideration of additional information to address a range of matters. In particular, additional information in relation to the transport/traffic implications and associated mitigation is awaited. Once received, this information will enable Surrey County Council to reach a conclusion on the transport matters and advise this Council accordingly. As it stands, that application is not likely to be determined until August at the earliest.
18. Infrastructure concerns, particularly roads/transport have not just been considered in relation to the Dunsfold Aerodrome site. Officers have worked closely with Surrey County Council, the Highway Authority, as well as other infrastructure and service providers, and the Council's own transport consultants Mott MacDonald, to consider the effects of the strategy, particularly the number and location of homes, on infrastructure in other hotspots around the Borough. In particular, consideration has been given to the impacts around Farnham, where the Borough's road network is already the most congested. The evidence has shown that there will be some impacts on the network, including in some areas the potential for additional congestion. There are also various mitigation measures that have been considered. The key matter is that, to date, there has been no indication of an issue that is so fundamental in its impact that advice has been given that the number of homes should be reduced or the distribution altered. Some of the transport work is ongoing. For example more work is being undertaken to look at the knock-on effects on the Farnham road network as a result of some of the mitigation measures that have been considered. In addition, there is ongoing work with Highways England, Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council to address the potential impact of development in Guildford and Waverley on the A3 through Guildford. There are some very significant sites in Guildford, close to the A3. However, Highways England

also needs to assess the cumulative impact on the A3 both from growth in Guildford itself and from development related traffic arising in Waverley. These discussions with Highways England, Guildford Borough Council and Waverley are ongoing.

19. Other key elements of Local Plan Part 1 include:-

- a policy setting out the thresholds and percentages for the delivery of affordable homes and policies relating to other housing/accommodation needs;
- the Council's policy on employment including identifying the need for additional employment space and the Council's approach to delivering this;
- The Council's approach to the Green Belt and landscape designations, including areas where the Green Belt will change either through removal of land or additions to the Green Belt;
- The Council's approach to town centres;
- The Council's approach in relation to biodiversity, including policies required to ensure that development does not have an adverse impact on designated sites;
- The allocation of a number of strategic sites.

How the Local Plan will be assessed

20. There are a number of tests of soundness that the Inspector will consider when examining the Local Plan. These include very specific procedural requirements. In addition, there is the test of whether the Council has met the 'duty to co-operate'. This is a requirement to show how the Council has worked to ensure that strategic matters with cross boundary implications have been addressed in collaboration with key partners. Examples include the joint working on the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and joint working to identify and address cross boundary highway issues.

21. In addition, the Inspector will be considering other tests of soundness, namely:-

- Has the Local Plan been **positively prepared**? The expectation is that the Plan will be based on a strategy that seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements and is consistent with achieving sustainable development.
- Is the Plan **justified**? This means demonstrating that the Plan is the most appropriate strategy, when considered against reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence.
- Is the Plan **effective**? This means demonstrating that the Plan is deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities.
- Is the Plan **consistent with national policy**? The Plan is expected to enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the NPPF

Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

22. Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are key parts of the preparation of the Local Plan. The SA is the tool to appraise the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the Local Plan. In this case the SA has informed various stages in the production of the Local Plan. This includes using the SA to appraise the different options and alternatives that have been considered during the evolution of the Plan. The draft Plan is consistent with the findings of the emerging SA. The final SA report will be one of the main documents published alongside the Plan itself.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

23. There is a legal requirement through the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (referred to as the Habitat Regulations) to consider whether the Local Plan is likely to have a significant effect on European sites of nature conservation importance prior to the Plan being given effect (S102). Officers have worked closely with the consultants Aecom and Natural England during the preparation of Local Plan Part 1 to ensure that the Strategy and policies are not likely to have a significant effect on European sites. This includes particularly consideration of the distribution of new homes and the policies specifically relating to the affected habitats. A final version of the HRA is being produced and is another document that will sit alongside the Plan when it is published.

Other key supporting documents

24. Other key documents that will be produced for publication alongside the Local Plan will include the updated Consultation Statement. This will set out the details of who was invited to comment on the Plan during its production; how these bodies/individuals were invited to comment; a summary of the main issues raised by those making comments; and how these main issues have been addressed in the Plan. Officers will also be updating the statement explaining what the Council has done to address the 'duty to co-operate'.
25. A further key supporting document will be the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). This will pull together all the information on current and future infrastructure investment, including the infrastructure required to support the development that is expected to take place over the plan period.

Next Steps

26. The Local Plan Special Interest Group (SIG) has considered the emerging Local Plan and will continue to play a key role in contributing to the development of the final Plan.
27. The Publication will trigger the formal pre-submission representation period, the responses to which will be considered by the appointed Inspector. Following this, the next formal stage is the Submission itself, which is

expected to be in November. Officers anticipate that the Examination hearings would take place in Spring 2017 with adoption, following receipt of the Inspector's report, expected later in the year.

Conclusion

28. The Local Plan Part 1 has reached a major milestone. In essence, Publication is the stage when the Council has finalised what it believes to be a 'sound' Plan, ready for submission. At this stage Members are invited to forward any comments that they have on the draft pre-submission Local Plan to the Executive for consideration.

Recommendation

That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the draft Local Plan Part 1 and forwards any comments to the Executive.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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