

**WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**EXECUTIVE – 03/03/2015**

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**Title:**

**LOCAL PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

**[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Brian Adams]**

**[Wards Affected: All]**

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**Summary and purpose:**

Following the withdrawal from Examination of the Core Strategy, the Council has been carrying out a detailed programme of work to address the matters raised by the Examination Inspector in order to prepare an updated Local Plan for re-submission for Examination. The broad scope of that work and the timetable were endorsed by the Executive on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013. The purpose of this report is to bring members up to date on the work carried out to date, including a summary of the key issues coming out of the recent consultation on housing scenarios and other issues, and to seek support in principle from the Executive and Council to an emerging preferred strategy for the distribution of new homes, subject to further testing.

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

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

**Financial Implications:**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this progress report.

**Legal Implications:**

There are no legal issues arising specifically from this report. When the revised Local Plan is submitted for Examination it will be necessary to ensure that it meets the legal tests of soundness, including the new 'duty to co-operate'.

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**1. Background**

- 1.1 Following the withdrawal of the Core Strategy in October 2013, work has continued on the preparation of a new Local Plan, building on the foundations of the Core Strategy and addressing the specific issues raised by the Examination Inspector when he recommended the withdrawal.
- 1.2 The broad scope of the work was endorsed by the Executive in December 2013. The new Local Plan is being produced in two stages. Part 1 will set out the overall strategy and key strategic policies. It will also include strategic land allocations. Part 2 will contain other site allocations and include the wider suite of development management policies.

1.3 A significant amount of work that has been carried out since the Core Strategy was withdrawn. A key part of this has been developing and updating the evidence base and identifying and testing potential housing scenarios. The work carried out includes:-

- The new Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) that was jointly commissioned with Guildford and Woking Borough Councils;
- The updated Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), starting with a database of over 700 sites;
- The updated Employment Land Review (ELR);
- The Traveller Accommodation Assessment (TAA);
- The Landscape Study;
- The Green Belt Review;
- On-going liaison with infrastructure providers to consider the implications arising from different housing scenarios;
- On-going work to consider the transport/highway implications of the scenarios;
- On-going liaison with neighbouring authorities to identify and address cross boundary issues;
- The Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessments produced to accompany the housing scenarios consultation;
- Developing and consulting on the scenarios for housing and analysing the responses (see below);
- On-going work to support the towns and parishes proposing neighbourhood plans.

## **2. Key Issues for Local Plan Part 1**

2.1 Having regard to the Inspector's comments at the Core Strategy examination, the key issue for the Local Plan will be determining the overall amount of new housing that can be sustainably accommodated in Waverley and its broad distribution.

2.2 Other key issues, which are linked to the number and distribution of homes, will be the Council's policies on employment development; the approach the Council takes to the Green Belt and other local or national designations that impact on housing supply; and the issue for what infrastructure is needed to support the new development expected over the plan period.

## **3. National Context**

3.1 The Local Plan is being prepared in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which provides guidance on the application of the NPPF. A major challenge in producing the new Local Plan has been the changing picture in terms of national policy/guidance. Over the last 12 months the Government has continued to update and clarify the way in which national planning policy should be interpreted and applied. For example, in the

autumn the Government sought to clarify further its guidance on how Green Belt should be treated when preparing a Local Plan. Similarly, in December, Brandon Lewis MP wrote to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate to say that the outcome from a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) is untested and that Councils will need to consider the SHMA evidence carefully and take adequate time to consider whether there are environmental and policy constraints, such as Green Belt, which will impact on their overall final housing requirement.

#### **4. Consultation on Housing Scenarios and Other Issues**

- 4.1 Against this background the Council approved for consultation four potential housing scenarios. These indicated how 8,500 new homes could potentially be distributed over the plan period up to 2031 (470 homes a year). This was the level of housing need identified in the Draft SHMA from October 2013.
- 4.2 Given the constraints of the Green Belt and the AONB, the areas identified with most potential were sites around Farnham and Cranleigh, which are not within the Green Belt or AONB, and the Dunsfold Aerodrome site. Of the four scenarios, one did not include any housing at Dunsfold Aerodrome and therefore had the highest level of greenfield development. The other three Scenarios included different levels of housing at the Aerodrome site (1,800, 2,600 and 3,400). These are levels of growth being actively assessed by the site's promoters.
- 4.3 It was made very clear at the time of the consultation that more work was needed before either the overall housing target could be finalised or the distribution of new homes finalised. The consultation provided the opportunity for residents and other interested parties to comment on these scenarios and other matters relevant to the Local Plan, so that these comments could be taken into account by the Council in moving the Plan forward.
- 4.4 Among the issues identified as requiring more work before the housing number and distribution could be finalised were infrastructure capacity, including roads, and the work needed to mitigate or avoid impact on the important European (Habitats Directive) Sites in Waverley.

#### **5. Outcome from the Consultation**

- 5.1 A total of 4,265 Individuals/organisations responded to the consultation. Attached as Annexe 1 is a summary of the responses. Members will recall that the consultation document included a number of questions linked to various Local Plan issues. Those responding were invited to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement contained within the question. In relation to the four housing scenarios, respondents were also invited to indicate their preference. There was also the opportunity to identify any other housing scenarios that the Council should be considering.

- 5.2 The first part of Annexe 1 contains graphs illustrating the responses to the questions and the preferences in terms of the four housing scenarios. In terms of the scenarios, there was overwhelming support (80%) for Scenario 4 as the preference.
- 5.3 In addition to the numerical response, there were also a large number of individual comments on the scenarios and other matters relating to the Local Plan. Annexe 1 also contains a summary of the key issues emerging from these comments.
- 5.4 Officers are now reviewing the comments on the scenarios to identify whether there are any other reasonable alternatives that should be subject to further investigation.

## **6. Taking the Plan Forward**

- 6.1 It is clear that there is significant support from those responding to the consultation to a housing strategy that includes a new settlement at the Dunsfold Aerodrome site. However, the fact that Scenario 4, (which includes 3,400 homes at the Aerodrome site), is the most favoured by respondents does not automatically make it the strategy that will be included in the Local Plan.
- 6.2 It was made clear at the time of the consultation that more work was still required to assess the infrastructure implications for the scenarios generally, including the impact on the road network, and the extent to which impacts could be mitigated.
- 6.3 As identified in Annexe 1, one of the main issues raised in response to the consultation was the perceived inadequacy of existing infrastructure and the impact of adding even more pressure on infrastructure. The transport/road infrastructure was considered to be the biggest issue. Having regard to this, and the fact that the impact on the road network was the main reason why the 2009 Dunsfold Aerodrome appeal scheme failed, it is clear that the most significant decision that will inform the number and distribution of new homes in the Local Plan will be whether or not housing can be delivered at Dunsfold Aerodrome.
- 6.4 Officers are already working with Surrey County Council to address this issue. In addition, the promoters of the Aerodrome site have also submitted their own transport assessment of the impact of different levels of housing growth at Dunsfold Aerodrome. That study is currently being reviewed by the County Council, which has already indicated that there are a number of matters that the promoters of the site will have to consider further before the County Council can reach a final view on the study and the transport implications of development at Dunsfold Aerodrome.
- 6.5 Given the importance of the transport infrastructure issue, the Council has also decided to commission additional consultancy advice on transport matters, to complement the work carried out by Surrey County Council. If transport infrastructure is an issue that ultimately influences the number/distribution of new homes, it will be important to have robust evidence to support the Council's position.

- 6.6 Whilst, given the previous history, much of the focus has been on the Dunsfold Aerodrome site, it is essential that the transport implications of possible alternative scenarios are understood and weighed alongside other considerations. This was clearly in the mind of the Secretary of State when concluding that the 2009 scheme was premature. For example, in order to achieve the same number of new homes a strategy that excludes Dunsfold Aerodrome would put more pressure on greenfield sites around Farnham and Cranleigh and would also put more pressure on the road network in those areas. It is already recognised that the area of Waverley that currently has the most significant traffic issues is Farnham.
- 6.7 The provisional timetable for the Local Plan was to publish a draft plan for consultation in March. However, this was provisional subject to what came out of the consultation and any changes in Government policy/guidance. It is clear from the consultation and the discussions with the Dunsfold Park promoters that more work is needed to fully assess the transport implications of developing that site with housing.
- 6.8 It is envisaged that the transport work to be undertaken by the consultants will be carried out in stages. Having first reviewed the existing evidence, including the Strategic Transport Assessment (STA) published by Surrey County Council in September 2014, the first part will be the identification of the key junctions and links on the network affected by scenarios for housing distribution. The consultants will then carry out more detailed work to assess the impacts on these parts of the road network and the extent to which those impacts can be mitigated. In the first instance the focus will be on the A281 corridor and how this would be affected by new development at Dunsfold Aerodrome alongside other developments within Waverley and in the adjoining districts.
- 6.9 The Council remains fully committed to getting the new Local Plan in place as soon as possible. However, it is also necessary to ensure that all the reasonable alternatives are properly assessed and that whatever strategy is finally pursued is justified by the evidence.
- 6.10 Whilst more work clearly needs to be done, it is apparent that, subject to the more detailed assessment of the transport impacts, including some housing at Dunsfold Aerodrome may offer the best opportunity to meet housing needs and is an option which has the support of many of Waverley's residents. This is particularly because the latest version of the SHMA, published in December 2014, indicates that Waverley's housing need may have risen to at least 512 homes a year. Current evidence suggests that the alternative would be to plan for even more housing on greenfield land on the edge of Farnham and Cranleigh.
- 6.11 In the light of the above, the focus of the work going forward should be to reach a view as soon as possible of whether or not the transport issues previously identified for the Dunsfold Aerodrome site can be addressed and if so, what level of housing growth would be acceptable, taking account of other reasonable alternatives. It will also be necessary to

identify precisely when new housing could be delivered at the site and whether any development on the site would be likely to run on beyond the end of the Plan period. The potential timing of development is crucial because even if the Council concludes that some housing at Dunsfold Aerodrome should be included in the plan, it is unlikely to deliver much if any housing in the first five years following adoption of the plan. Given the on-going absence of a 5-year housing supply, this means that some greenfield releases will be required in the early years of the plan.

- 6.12 Alongside this transport review, work will continue to update the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), including some more detailed work on the potential suitability and deliverability of the many sites that have been promoted to the Council as potential housing sites.
- 6.13 In taking the Plan forward, it is considered helpful if the Executive endorses the Statement of Principles which is attached as Annexe 2.

## **7. Other Matters**

- 7.1 In addition to the work on transport infrastructure and the SHLAA, other key areas of work in the coming months include:
- A potential further update to the SHMA when the Government finally publishes updated household projections;
  - Completing the evidence on employment needs to identify a realistic target for the number of new jobs envisaged in Waverley over the plan period;
  - Updating the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA), including examining in more detail how potential housing sites could be affected by flooding; and
  - Updating/reviewing the Traveller Accommodation Assessment (TAA).

## **8. Timetable**

- 8.1 It is unlikely that the first stages of the proposed Transport Assessment will be completed until May/June, which will clearly have a knock-on effect on the overall timetable. Once it is clearer how long it will take for consultants to complete the Transport Assessment, an updated timetable will be prepared.

## **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 Whilst the consultation response indicates an overwhelming preference for delivering housing at Dunsfold Aerodrome compared to the alternative of releasing more greenfield land on the edge of settlements, it is also clear that more technical work is required to assess the transport implications of such an approach, to identify more precisely the likely impact on the road network before deciding whether or not the preferred Local Plan strategy should include housing at Dunsfold Aerodrome.. Whilst this provides a clear focus for the work going forward, it will not be possible to complete this work within the timetable envisaged prior to the consultation.

## **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Executive

1. notes the outcome from the consultation and supports in principle the way forward as set out in the report; and
2. endorses the Statement of Principles attached as Annexe 2.

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## **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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