

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 8

meeting date: THURSDAY, 17 JUNE 2010
title: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - DRAFT CORE STRATEGY
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 The implications of the Government's recent announcements on the changes to regional spatial strategies for the Ribble Valley Core Strategy.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – The Core Strategy is the central strategy of the Local Development Framework. It will help in the delivery of housing, employment and the protection and enhancement of the environment, ultimately presenting the delivery strategy for implementing the vision for the Ribble Valley for the next 15 years.
- Community Objectives – As tool for delivering spatial policy, it identifies how a range of issues relating to the objectives of a sustainable economy, thriving market towns and housing provision will be addressed through the planning system.
- Corporate Priorities – The Core Strategy is the central document of the LDF and sets the overall vision and approach to future planning policy, which will aid performance and consistency.
- Other Considerations – The Council has a duty to prepare spatial policy under the Local Development Framework system.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members are aware that work has been moving forward on a Draft Core Strategy as part of the Local Development Framework for the area. Officers were due to present the Draft Strategy with a view to publication for public consultation over this summer. This would draw together information from the evidence base and the previous consultations on issues and options formally presenting a series of development scenarios. These options would then be further refined to produce a second stage plan that would start to set out how development in the area would be directed. Members have had previous briefings on this in conjunction with the work on the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) undertaken last year. This indicated the scale of land that would need to be released to meet housing requirements and around which other land uses such as open space and employment land would also need to be determined.

2.2 The work to date has been based around alignment with the adopted (September 2008) Regional Spatial Strategy. Whilst the RSS deals with a wide range of issues, a key issue for this authority has always been the delivery of housing land to meet the provisions set out in that plan. Consequently the strategy of the emerging Core Strategy

was one of identifying ways to accommodate housing growth in the area. Members will be aware that the Government has recently announced its intention to abolish RSS, issuing a statement to that effect which is to be treated as a material consideration as appropriate. This raises a number of issues to consider as the RSS both underpins the development plan work we are currently engaged with as well as day-to-day planning applications as it is the basis for the housing land supply against which the guidance and policy of Planning Policy Statement 3 is applied and the Council's delivery of affordable housing is also related to.

- 2.3 Officers have sought advice from Government Office contacts who have reaffirmed their position that local planning authorities should continue with their plan making as appropriate but should seek a steer from Members upon the approach to RSS. Further guidance was anticipated from the Planning Minister but at the time of writing no such guidance has been published. A verbal update will be given at the Committee meeting should anything further be received. It needs to be borne in mind that RSS is still in place, as is the legal framework for the creation of Local Development Frameworks, similarly planning guidance is still set within the LDF process. Some guidance has been published by the Planning Inspectorate to help Inspectors deal with the current circumstances which is a helpful reference, a copy of this is attached for information.

3 RSS HOUSING NUMBERS

- 3.1 Members are asked to give consideration to how the Council should continue to treat the RSS in the current circumstances in particular in relation to housing matters. The evidence and information that underpins the RSS is still in place and sets an up-to-date position on the strategy and guidance in the RSS. In terms of housing numbers it seeks to ensure in Ribble Valley's case that a minimum of 161 dwellings per year are planned for. This figure was the subject of review in 2008 when the RSS was being finalised. At that time the Council considered a number of options including high growth scenarios, minimal growth and options that looked at different spatial distribution of development across the region. Planning and Development Committee considered a report in June 2008, Minute 191 refers. It was recognised that given the quality of the rural environment (over 70% of the area designated as Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty for example) and the impact that high growth options would have on this character of the area a scenario close to the existing levels of housing provision set out in the spatial plan was preferred. Ultimately this resulted in the figures established in the current RSS continuing at 161.
- 3.2 The consideration given to the RSS housing figures was consistent with that given in the dealing with generation of the plan only a few years earlier when this Authority supported the provision being made in the plan. Ribble Valley as a Council, has therefore taken a position where it as not sought to challenge the current RSS figures based upon the needs of the Borough and the desire to protect the character of its area. Evidence from the Council's Strategic Housing Market Assessment and our own monitoring of housing completions before the moratorium was in place (pre 2004) would also support a position of housing delivery that reflected the current RSS position, namely, a level of development that was at least giving in the order of 161 units per year through market delivery, in some years levels were well above this rate however.
- 3.3 If Members sought to revise the level of housing provision additional work would need to be undertaken on the housing evidence base to refresh the existing housing market

assessment, although the adopted Strategic Housing Market Assessment indicates a significant shortfall in affordable housing provision, at a level higher than the annual housing figures we are currently working to. Consequently our own evidence base as it stands at the moment would indicate a higher level of provision is required than the RSS. In the absence of any additional evidence work it is suggested that the Council should continue to apply the existing RSS figures as the basis of its housing requirements, certainly to establish a working position for the determination of planning applications and to secure affordable housing in the immediate future.

- 3.4 The delivery of affordable housing is a key ambition for this Authority, and given the likelihood that central funding for housing providers to meet housing needs will be reduced, the need to facilitate provision in conjunction with housing market schemes will be one of the principal means of securing affordable housing in the area. If less market housing is delivered (by lowering planned requirements) it will be far more difficult for the Council to meet its affordable housing ambitions. This consideration also supports the approach of continuing to work with the established RSS housing figures.

4 THE CORE STRATEGY

- 4.1 As a statutory development plan the Core Strategy has to be taken through a series of formal steps in the plan making process. The next key, and critical step to the Ribble Valley Core Strategy, is to publish for consultation a series of options formulated around a vision and a number of objectives. This would be subject to a 6 week period of statutory consultation which would then lead to the Council preparing what is in effect its preferred or proposed plan informed by that consultation together with the supporting evidence that that Council has drawn together so far. The strategy options are designed to deliver the levels of housing provision set out in the RSS, namely 161 houses per year over a 15 year period. Whilst the core strategy itself does not allocate land it will establish where development would take place and potentially through strategic site options, identify areas of search for development land. Although the key issue for the Council is delivering housing land the strategy would also look at employment land development needs and infrastructure provisions to support it. Other parts of the Local Development Framework would deal with progressively more detailed elements of planning policy.

- 4.2 The strategy options developed so far will require the release of relatively extensive areas of Greenfield land. In identifying suitable land the Council would have regard to the evidence base and particularly the survey material published in the adopted Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. As a consequence in taking forward the existing approach based around adopted RSS figures the Council will be consulting the public on a draft plan that will lead to Greenfield land coming forward. This brings with it the risk of creating some public concern at a time when the strategic basis is on notice to be changed. We do not of course know at this stage, and it could be some time before a replacement system can be put in place, how the process will change. However, there is also a high risk that should the Council not be in a position to put forward its proposals for an area, there will be pressure to determine applications without a local strategic framework and significant amounts of development could come forward in an uncoordinated way. There could be a significant level of appeals without a clear picture of how the Council would wish to see the area develop.

- 4.3 There would not of course be a complete policy vacuum at the local level as the saved policies of the Districtwide Local Plan will remain (pending any changes to planning legislation) however whilst in terms of settlement policies the existing strategy has some relevance, it provides no real opportunities to consider development and growth with very limited capacity within existing tightly drawn settlement boundaries and no further allocations of housing land in particular to be brought forward. In essence there is a need to put in place a local level strategy (Core Strategy) that provides an up-to-date framework to help manage development in the area.
- 4.4 Some authorities have because of pressure particularly on greenbelt land have chosen to stop work on their Core Strategies where they are at a stage of formal examination or further on in the statutory process. Many of these authorities are located in the southeast where pressures from release of large amounts of housing land have been particularly strong. It is an option not to progress any further work on the Core Strategy and to await the outcome of a revised plan making system. However the process of putting legislation in place means that there is likely to be a long period when there would be no framework with which the Council can guide and steer development at the local level.
- 4.5 In Ribble Valley's case it is considered important therefore to continue with the current stages of work on the Core Strategy to get to a position whereby options are tested, and a preferred approach can be identified. We would need to reflect the established regulations in doing so to support taking the work forward through any transitional stages, or were it more appropriate to take an informal, non-statutory approach pending a review of the plan making process. This would mean any resulting non-statutory process would have some weight as it had followed recognised procedures. By the time the Council would need to be in a position to commit to further statutory stages, the position could be assessed before any additional expenditure was made. This would be particularly important as we approach the stage after next, namely formal submission and public examination by a Planning Inspector which is the most costly part of the process.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 There are a number of important implications of the abolition of the RSS. There are practical implications in dealing with planning applications for which the RSS provides the basis of housing land supply. There are also important implications for progressing the Core Strategy and putting in place a local planning policy framework to safeguard the interests of the borough.
- 5.2 Although the ministerial statement provides the opportunity to ignore the RSS housing figures pending further formal guidance, to do so would make the immediate function as Local Planning Authority extremely difficult. The Council should consider the adoption of the existing RSS housing figures as the basis for its housing land supply based upon the RSS and local evidence base.
- 5.3 Members should also consider for the purposes of progressing a locally derived plan for the area to continue with the current stages of the draft Core Strategy as this will inform both the current statutory process, any transitional arrangements (yet to be published) and if appropriate a non-statutory interim approach for the Council. Members will be kept informed of any new regulations or statements as issued, together with the

implications for the Council's plan making responsibilities. In addition there may well be further opportunities explored with Pennine Lancashire authorities to determine whether the level of strategic plan making could be dealt with at Pennine Lancashire level.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The matters dealt with in this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – Resources to carry forward the Core Strategy to its next stage are contained within existing budgets.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Core Strategy is part of the statutory plan making process.
- Political – None.
- Reputation – The Council's decision on how to proceed may affect its reputation and it needs to be able to demonstrate its role as Local Planning Authority when determining how the area is to develop.

5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Confirm the application of the adopted Regional Spatial Strategy as the strategic basis for housing land supply monitoring and developing the Draft Core Strategy pending further information or revisions to the statutory development plan process.
- 5.2 Instruct the Director of Development Services to report on the Draft Core Strategy to the next available Committee.

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

For further information please ask for Colin Hirst, extension 4503.

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