

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COUNCIL

DECISION

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 6 MARCH 2012  
title: PETITION RECEIVED FROM CLITHEROE RESIDENTS ACTION GROUP  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
principal authors: COLIN HIRST – HEAD OF REGENERATION & HOUSING  
MICHELLE HAWORTH – PRINCIPAL POLICY & PERFORMANCE OFFICER

## 1. PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Council of the receipt of a petition from the Clitheroe Residents Action Group (CRAG) and recommend what action to take regarding the matters raised.

1.2 Relevance to the council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions: To protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area.
- Community Objectives: The Core Strategy Vision has strong links to both the Sustainable Community Strategy and RVBC Corporate Strategy Vision.
- Corporate Priorities: To be a well-managed authority.
- Other Considerations: None.

## 2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Council welcomes petitions and recognises that petitions are one way in which people can raise their concerns.

2.2 Petitions offer an opportunity for members of the public, groups and organisations to get more directly involved in the decisions and activities of the Council. Petitions can have a number of aims and objectives including to:

- allow communities to have direct influence in the democratic process;
- provide direct access to elected members and other key policy makers;
- allow citizens to raise awareness of a particular campaign and put issues on the agenda which might not otherwise be considered by the accountable body;
- stimulate council debate;
- result in policy changes; and
- give accountable bodies more access to opinion and feedback on policy decisions.

The Council has an adopted petition scheme that provides further guidance on the procedures involved.

2.3 Petitions, which have been signed by the requisite number of people (600<sup>1</sup>), may be

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<sup>1</sup> Rounded up from 585 – which is based on 1 per cent of the local population of RVBC 58,500 (ONS 2008 mid year population estimate)

presented at Council<sup>2</sup> during the public participation session by delegations of not more than three persons. Only one person from the delegation (normally the petition organiser) shall be permitted to speak for a maximum of three minutes. The petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes.

2.4 The Council must decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting. The Council's response to a petition will depend on what a petition asks for and how many people have signed it, but may include one or more of the following:

- taking the action requested in the petition
- holding an inquiry into the matter
- undertaking research into the matter
- holding a public meeting
- holding a consultation
- holding a meeting with petitioners
- referring the petition for consideration by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny committee
- calling a referendum
- writing to the petition organiser setting out our views about the request in the petition
- considering the petition at a council meeting.

2.5 The Council will consider all the actions it can potentially take on the issues highlighted in this petition. They may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by referring it to a relevant committee.

2.6 The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of the decision taken. This confirmation will also be published on the feedbackonline website.

### 3. THE PETITION RECEIVED

3.1 The Clitheroe Residents Action (CRAG) had opened an online petition on the feedback online website. The subject of the petition is:

*"We request that The Core Strategy on housing reflect the location and distribution of the Borough of Ribble Valley population as it currently is. Whilst we recognise the need for future housing in the Borough of Ribble Valley we request that the housing needs of the Borough should represent the same proportion as population distribution. Therefore, as the town of Clitheroe currently constitutes 25% of the total Borough of Ribble Valley population, the proposed new developments within this town should also equate to 25% of the total requirement, thus ensuring a fair and equitable approach to future housing needs."*

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<sup>2</sup> Petitions which are signed by at least ten residents of the borough (ie not meeting the threshold to be debated at Full Council), shall be referred to the next meeting of the committee which deals with the subject matter of the petition. These may be presented informally to the chairman of that committee.

- 3.2 By the time the petition was closed on the 20 February the petition had been signed by 889 signatories and a paper petition on the same subject had received a further 206 signatures. This petition was submitted to the Council on the 20 February 2012.
- 3.3 An acknowledgement was sent to the petition organisers in accordance with the Council's Policy and advised them that the petition would be considered at the Council meeting as the petition had received more than 600 signatures.
- 3.4 This report considers the matters raised in the petition.

#### 4. THE CORE STRATEGY

- 4.1 The petition clearly relates to the preparation of the Core Strategy, which as Members will know is within the remit of the Council's Planning and Development Committee. The Core Strategy is part of the Local Development Framework that is prepared within a formal statutory process in which consultation has a significant part.
- 4.2 The Core Strategy is the central document within the framework and will provide the vital policy tool with which to plan and manage development in the area. It will be the main defence against development proposals that are not viewed by the Council, to be serving the interests of the area and where they would be out of accord with the Core Strategy policies.
- 4.3 The policies within the framework must be informed by a strong, robust, evidence base and therefore over the past few years, work has focused on creating the LDF baseline, identifying issues and developing options. The Core Strategy, has been progressively formulated from this baseline and is moving towards key stages in its development. An extensive range of reports has been considered by members and are published on the Council's web site.
- 4.4 Consultation on issues to be considered in the Core Strategy has been taking place since 2006. Questionnaires were circulated in the borough in both 2006 and 2007 from which it was possible to formulate a draft consultation document under Regulation 25 of the regulations. This consultation document contained a series of options for the spatial development strategy for the Core Strategy. It set out strategy options and illustrated general areas for development and likely scale over the plan period. This was consulted upon between August and October 2010.
- 4.5 A wide range of methods for promoting public involvement were also put in place to provide the opportunity for any organizations or persons in or out of the borough to submit representations into the Core Strategy process by:
- holding an 8 week consultation response period between 25 August and 20 October 2010;
  - distributing posters for local display;
  - offering the opportunity for each Parish/Town Council to hold a meeting attended by members of the Forward Planning team, providing the opportunity for local residents to attend these meetings and ask questions. Meetings were held across the borough and included all parishes;
  - making the Core Strategy report and response forms available at all libraries in the borough, the Council Offices, the Station Buildings in Longridge and available for loan from Parish/Town Councils;

- publishing the report and both a downloadable response form and electronic submission form on the Council's website and the Pennine Lancashire wide Feedback website;
- producing an explanatory booklet on the Core Strategy setting out the main principles and ways to respond making these available at the venues listed the above and some other locations in the borough such as some shops, gyms, post offices etc;
- inserting 11,000 copies of the explanatory booklet into the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times as the most widely circulated local newspaper in the borough;
- publishing numerous press releases in the local press, including the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times, the Longridge News and the Lancashire Evening Telegraph;
- attending workshops, running a session at Ribchester C of E Primary School following a request, running a stall at an Openhouse Roadshow meeting in Chipping to disseminate information and running a drop in session just outside the borough following a request from neighbouring Parish Council.

4.6 The level of response to this consultation was encouraging, with just under 4000 comments, or representations, submitted into the consultation process by just under 750 bodies/consultees. New contacts were added to our contact list for future consultations.

4.7 Consultation on the initial options identified a number of issues but did not establish a definitive approach to the development strategy. It was considered that further options should be presented for consultation and therefore between June and August 2011, an additional consultation featuring alternative options including potential scale and patterns of distribution was consulted upon. The approach to consultation once again was aimed at encouraging as broad a response as possible including measures such as:

- holding a 6 week consultation response period between 29 June and 12 August 2011;
- running a drop in day, which was advertised in the press between 10am and 7:30pm on 27 July 2011 offering the opportunity for all interested parties to speak one on one with members of the Forward Planning team, and ask questions;
- making the Generation of Alternative Development Strategy Options report available at all libraries in the borough, the Council Offices, the Station Buildings in Longridge and available for loan from Parish Councils;
- publishing the report and both a downloadable response form on the Council's website and creating a summary and link from the Pennine Lancashire wide Feedback website;
- producing a poster to advertise both the consultation and the planning drop in day, with information on how to get involved in the consultation process;
- publishing numerous press releases in the local press, including the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times, the Longridge News and the Lancashire Evening Telegraph to give details on both the consultation itself and also the planning drop in day;

- writing to all Parish/Town Council Clerks in and adjacent to the borough, all borough Members and to all contacts on the LDF consultation database (over 2000 contacts);
- sending out notices informing local residents of the consultation via a Royal Mail postal drop. This reached approximately 90% of all households in the borough.

4.8 As with the 2010 consultation, interest and involvement in the Core Strategy consultation remained high. Formal representations were received from 1150 bodies/individuals, containing a total of 2807 representations. When compared to the 2010 consultation it is evident that although around 400 more individual letters/response forms were submitted at this alternative options stage, this generated 1113 fewer separate representations or 'issues'. Reviewing the responses it was considered that this reduction in reps or 'issues' relates to a high number of people submitting a highlighted preferred option rather than listing why no development should happen in the borough at all.

4.9 An aim of the consultation was to identify which of the Development Strategy options was the preferred approach to development across Ribble Valley up to 2028. It is considered that unlike the 2010 consultation stage, the results of the consultation mean that it will be possible to progress to selecting a preferred option which will take into account the differing options and implications of different strategies. The outcome of this consultation resulted in a large amount of information being submitted, from which the preferred development strategy option set out in the Direction of Travel Topic paper, considered by Planning and Development Committee in December 2011 was derived. The issue of the distribution of development is a key component of the work. This paper was prepared to enable members to discuss and agree the emerging direction of travel to inform the process. Work is currently being undertaken to bring together all the relevant elements to date, including completing the supporting Sustainability Appraisal testing to establish the preferred option (or pre-submission/publication version) which will be considered by Members at a forthcoming meeting anticipated in March.

4.10 This work on the Development Strategy option will be presented in the publication version of the Core Strategy, (also referred to by some as the preferred option report). The draft will be published for a 6-week statutory consultation period. Responses will be considered and any subsequent changes to the document will be made prior to agreement at Full Council to the submission of the Core Strategy (under Regulation 30) to the Secretary of State.

4.11 The Council's Planning and Development Committee will consider the outcome of the consultation and the issues raised prior to recommending the proposed submission strategy to the Council. Inevitably whilst Members will take into account representations received they will however have to take a decision that represents the wider balance of interests for the borough as a whole that may mean taking a position that does not meet all stakeholder aspirations.

4.12 It is anticipated that this submission stage will take place by May 2012. The Core Strategy will be subject to an Examination In Public probably during the autumn, held by an independent Inspector who will examine the soundness of the plan. The Inspector will examine whether the plan is justified through the evidence base, effective in terms of it being deliverable and flexible and if it is consistent with National Policy. The Inspector will also examine the process that has been undertaken to ensure the relevant regulations have been complied with.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 There is no doubt that many of the residents who have supported the petition, the majority from Clitheroe, feel strongly about future large-scale development in the

town. The Council has seen similar feelings expressed particularly in Whalley and Longridge as well as other parts of the Ribble Valley in relation to development proposals. The Council has a statutory duty to create a development plan for the area and in doing so has to have regard to a wide range of often-competing issues and interests. It also has to draw all relevant factors together in formulating its plan and reach a reasoned judgement that accords with the national policy and regulations within which the authority carries out its Planning functions. The Planning and Development Committee have the responsibility for carrying out that difficult, yet vital duty for the Council. It has to be recognised that the decision that is taken will not necessarily satisfy all concerns but will have to be the most appropriate one that serves the interests of the borough as a whole.

- 5.2 There is a formal statutory process within which the matter raised in the petition should be considered. The process for the Core Strategy continues to provide the appropriate opportunity for that to be given, including the opportunity for the Committee and subsequently the Council to have full regard to the proposition of the petition. The appropriate process continues to provide for the public to comment through further consultation, all the issues to be balanced together in taking any decisions and a formal Examination in Public of the Council's approach. In that regard the petition whilst not part of any formal consultation stage should be referred to the Planning and Development Committee to take account of in its work in progressing the Core Strategy when it can be looked at within the wider context of all applicable evidence and considerations.

## 6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- Resources: None.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal: The council needs to consider the petition within the scope of the adopted petition scheme. Decisions in relation to the Core Strategy need to be informed by a robust evidence base and be justified.
- Political: None.
- Reputation: There is significant public interest in the Core Strategy process.

## 7. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT COUNCIL

- 7.1 Supports the ongoing work of the Planning and Development Committee in developing the Council's Core Strategy and asks the Planning and Development Committee to consider the proposal put forward in the petition submitted by Clitheroe Residents Action Group when forming the Council's Preferred Option consultation document.

MARSHAL SCOTT  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

For further information on the Council's petition scheme please ask for Michelle Haworth, extension 4421. For information relation to the Core Strategy please ask for Colin Hirst, extension 4503.