

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 13 SEPTEMBER 2012
title: SITE ALLOCATIONS – INITIAL STAGES
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the background and initial steps to undertake site allocations work in connection with the Core Strategy.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – site allocations support the delivery of the Core Strategy, the Council's housing and employment ambitions and the implementation of the vision for the Ribble Valley over the next 20 years. As a tool for delivering spatial policy, site allocations will help the Council ensure the proper planning of the borough.
- Corporate Priorities – the work supports the Council's priorities of protecting and enhancing the local environment, delivering housing needs, promotion of economic development and being a well run Council.
- Other Considerations – the Council has a duty to prepare planning policies to ensure the needs of the area are met.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members are aware of the progress made with the preparation of the Core Strategy which has now reached submission stage. The Core Strategy establishes the principal strategic framework for the development of the borough up to 2028. It establishes amongst other things, the amount of, and patterns of new development to be planned for. The Core Strategy does not, in itself other than for the proposed strategic site include specific land allocations for housing and employment to meet the identified needs. The allocations will, particularly in regard to housing provide a key element of control for development coming forward to help implement the Core Strategy and is seen as an increasingly vital part of the Council's Planning Policy Framework. Clearly, the Government's advice is to encourage Local Planning Authorities to put in place the necessary development plan policies as soon as possible and therefore consideration needs to be given to bringing forward this key element of work.

2.2 Within the current Local Development Framework programme, the Council has previously identified the intention to prepare a supporting Development Plan Document (DPD) dealing with housing and economic development. This document was intended to be the policy tool through which site allocations would be made for housing and economic development and where necessary, any additional detailed policy coverage would be included. However, it should be noted that to a greater extent this latter

element has been superseded by the approach of the Core Strategy and the implications of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The DPD would also be the opportunity to review the existing settlement boundaries in the saved Local Plan accordingly as an integral part of that process. Work on the DPD would have progressed after the examination process for the Core Strategy.

3 HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DPD

- 3.1 The Housing and Economic DPD was a key part of the LDF programme devised to follow closely on from the preparation of the Core Strategy. Changing circumstances focused around the new NPPF and the increasing development pressures faced in the borough warrant the need to bring forward the preparation of the allocations in particular of housing sites.
- 3.2 The publication of the NPPF and new development plan regulations will need to be taken into account in dealing with site allocations with the resulting position complicated further by the stage and form of the Core Strategy and the Council's programmed approach that requires the associated DPD. Going forward in future years, there is a clear indication in the NPPF that the development plan process would move towards a single policy document approach where strategy and allocations were delivered together much like the old local plan or unitary plan system. Clearly, because of the stage the Council has reached and its previous approach, progress now needs to be made to bring together the Core Strategy and its subsequent allocations. It is also possible that the Inspector appointed to deal with the Core Strategy Examination may seek information on the Council's approach to allocations during the examination and it is helpful to have an identified course of action.
- 3.3 The focus of the housing and economic DPD will be towards the three basic elements of allocating land for housing, employment and revising the settlement boundaries. In reviewing the settlement boundaries, there will be a need to take account of land that may have an extant planning permission, (and therefore forms part of the existing supply), or to reflect development that has been previously completed. What should be noted however, is that the allocation process itself deals with allocating new land through this formal process, and establishing the principle of development, rather than simply reflecting sites with planning permission. The Council is in the situation where the rapid increase in planning approvals has superseded the settlement boundary in a number of places and whilst land will not need to be allocated as it has planning permission, settlement boundaries will need to be redefined to reflect those changes. This is likely to lead to some pressures to try and revisit for the longer term development sites. As a consequence of permissions however, in some instances, there will not be large numbers of new allocations needed as sites are already committed across the borough.
- 3.4 There are a number of preliminary stages to be undertaken which will be the subject of future reports as this work progresses. Initially a baseline will need to be established against which the proposed allocations will be generated. This is likely to be taken as the next quarter's housing land supply position (November), although this will need to be kept under review as time progresses to reflect any further planning approvals of significance. To help identify potential allocations that reflect the Core Strategy, reference will need to be made to a number of existing sources of information, including the adopted Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA), relevant submissions to the Core Strategy (where sites are identified) and records of sites that

owners, developers and their agents have notified the Council of. In addition, it is considered appropriate to publish a general 'call for sites' where an invitation is extended through the press and website to submit potential sites to the Council for consideration, normally over a defined 4-6 week period.

- 3.5 The intention will be to prepare an options paper on the proposed allocations that will be subject to public consultation and will inform the choice of proposed allocations. This would also provide a key vehicle for community engagement to obtain contributions to the process from the public, Town and Parish Councils together with a wide range of interested parties. This is viewed by Government as an important part of place shaping by the community and potentially could encourage neighbourhood planning initiatives. The work would also need to be subject to a range of supporting assessments, sustainability appraisal and subsequently to an Examination process. Although some of the costs involved in this will be contained within existing operational budgets at this stage, there will be additional costs to be met through future budget processes. It is anticipated however, that given the need to progress as soon as possible, Members should give consideration to a request that the Council's Budget Working Group identify a provisional budget of some £15,000 to progress work in the current financial year.
- 3.6 Clearly, detailed consideration needs to be given to the resources required to put in place the site allocations work. Existing staff resources will be heavily committed to the forthcoming Examination in Public leaving little scope to progress the allocations work, unless additional support is made. The initial stages could be addressed through extending existing temporary appointments, however this does not deal with the need to address the longer term view, including staff changes resulting from fixed term contracts ending. As an option work could be undertaken to review appointing consultancy support to undertake the work as an alternative. A further option would be to consider the appointment of an additional member of staff on a fixed term basis to provide the necessary policy support. As there is a considerable amount of work involved in exploring these options, especially the scoping and use of external consultancy, Members are asked to consider the principles of these options and to provide an initial steer to officers at this early stage.
- 3.7 The production of a site allocations DPD has to follow a series of statutory stages and will inevitably take time to put in place. It is anticipated that it could take up to two years to undertake the full process subject to approach and resourcing and of course the extent to which the delivery of planning permissions through the planning application process reduces the need for new land to be identified. It is for the Council, as Local Planning Authority however, to endeavour to establish the most expedient route to deliver the necessary allocations, in order to protect the area from inappropriate or less sustainable development and removing as far as possible uncertainty in terms of which areas are to be developed. This helps to enable other agencies to match their infrastructure delivery with a pattern of development on the ground. Given the existing significant development pressures being faced by the Council, it will clearly be expedient to keep the whole process under regular review.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – This report deals with a new area of work: costs for some preliminary work can be contained in existing budgets. A provisional, additional budget of £15,000 is sought to enable work to be brought forward to this current financial year ahead of the normal budgeting process. Work resulting from this report could give additional resource requirements that would be subject to further reports and Members' consideration.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council has to follow the statutory regulations in preparing a DPD. The site allocations work will be a key part of the implementation of the Core Strategy.
- Political – There is significant public interest in the development issues that will be raised by this work that will inevitably run parallel to the consideration of planning applications.
- Reputation – Decisions taken in connection with the site allocations DPD will help demonstrate the Council's obligations to fulfil its statutory role and meet the objective of being a well run Council demonstrating community leadership.
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Agree to refer a request for the provision of £15,000 to Policy and Finance Committee and that it be considered in conjunction with the Budget Working Group to facilitate the early commencement of work on the DPD, including the appointment of temporary staff cover as necessary.
- 5.2 Ask the Chief Executive to investigate further the delivery of site allocations work using specialist consultancy support reporting back to this Committee as soon as possible with his findings.
- 5.3 Agree to publish a call for sites over a four week period to inform the development of site allocation options and a preliminary allocations report.

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