



| Report of | Meeting | Date |
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| Joint LDF Officer Team | Central Lancashire LDF Joint Advisory Committee | 1 September 2011 |

CENTRAL LANCASHIRE CORE STRATEGY – OUTCOMES OF EXAMINATION HEARINGS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To brief Members of the overall outcomes of the Central Lancashire Core Strategy examination hearing sessions to date.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. To note the contents of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. This report summaries the main issues and outcomes of the examination hearing sessions that have been held so far. Apart from the matter of housing requirements (which is considered in more detail in a separate report on this agenda), the matters which led to most debate and consideration related to employment land, sustainable resources and the flexibility of the strategy.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

4. To keep members up to date with the main issues arising at the Core Strategy examination.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

5. None.

BACKGROUND

6. The Central Lancashire Core Strategy was published and placed on deposit on 8 December 2010. A total of 125 representations were received. Having considered the representations and then approved 51 Minor Changes, the Core Strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State on 31 March 2011.
7. At the time of submission although some matters had been sought to be satisfied by the Councils proposing minor changes, but still leaving numerous unresolved representations. In these circumstances and in order to ensure that the document may be found sound,

the Secretary of State is required to appoint an Inspector to examine the Core Strategy to test whether it is capable of being adopted as part of the development plan for Central Lancashire. Richard Hollox was appointed as the Inspector, and the Councils appointed Tony Blackburn to act as Programme Officer, and assist in the running of the examination.

THE EXAMINATION

8. Prior to the examination, the Inspector issued the Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) that he intended to investigate, and he invited anyone with an interest in the Core Strategy to make representations to him on them. The Councils, and all other interested parties, submitted their MIQ responses to the Inspector on 10 June 2011. The MIQs were:
 - (1) Vision, Strategy, Objectives and Sustainability
 - (2) Infrastructure and Monitoring
 - (3) Housing – General Needs, Deliverability, Density and Quality
 - (4) Retail, Leisure, Entertainment and Culture
 - (5) Affordable Housing and Other Needs
 - (6) The Built and Natural Environment
 - (7) Employment and Economic Development
 - (8) Other Locations and Sites and any other considerations
9. Between the deadline for submissions and the beginning of the examination hearings, officers held meetings with some of the representors in an effort to find areas of common ground. As a result of these meetings, a set of 11 Further Minor Changes were prepared, approved by Executive Members and submitted to the Inspector.
10. The formal business of the examination began with a Pre-Hearing meeting, held at the Gujarat Centre on South Meadow Lane, Preston, on 17 May. This allowed the Inspector to organise the hearings according to the agenda of the MIQs, and ensure that all parties were aware of the programme. The examination hearings began on 28 June, and were adjourned on 12 July, pending the consideration by the Inspector of responses to his letters on the subject of housing requirement.

SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES RAISED AT THE EXAMINATION

11. The big issue was housing requirement figures. Following the election of the Coalition Government in May 2010 and the ministerial announcement soon afterwards that Regional Spatial Strategies had been revoked the Core Strategy was amended. The revised housing policy sought to apply housing requirements at 80% of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) levels for at least two years and anticipated an early partial review of the subsequently adopted Core Strategy to put in place locally derived requirement figures for the longer term. The number/extent of identified strategic development locations was also reduced.
12. The Inspector's approach prior to the hearings was to ask the Councils and representors to prepare statements on how the Core Strategy related to the then recently produced Plan for Growth issued by the Government. The Inspector also asked representors for their versions of what the housing delivery policy (Policy 4) should include. Most representors (typically on behalf of house building interests) who produced statements in response to the Inspector's requests thought the Core Strategy did not sufficiently reflect the intentions of the Plan for Growth although many of the planning related initiatives had then only recently been announced (such as the proposed changes to the Use Classes Order) and it was by no means certain that such proposals would come into force.
13. In terms of the alternative wordings of the housing policy most representors wanted the RSS figures cited and previous years' under-provision to be quickly made up. Some representors produced their own housing requirement figures and these typically were

similar or higher than the RSS ones. Interestingly most representors stuck more or less to the 70% previously developed land (PDL or brownfield) target derived from the RSS although others argued that with the change in definition of greenfield land and the intended demise of the national target meant it was not longer applicable.

14. The Councils' case was that the RSS housing figures are out of date and were based on optimistic economic growth assumptions so now with the slump in the housing market and on-going restrictions on mortgage availability the effective demand for housing, at least in the short term, is much lower. In respect of the PDL target Officers argued that despite the change in definition sufficient brownfield land would come forward although recognising this is always difficult to predict far into the future.
15. Employment land requirements were also disputed. In this matter, the Councils assisted by 4NW in 2010, had chosen an approach which updated and extended to 2026 the RSS Lancashire land provision total and how our share of it could be calculated. As this took account of actual take-up of land up to 2008 it was more up to date than the original RSS figures and with the reduced rates of recent take-up produced lower requirement figures – about 20% lower. Nevertheless most representors considered the Core Strategy still had a too high employment land target, and many objectors with housing interests, argued that it was disproportionately higher than the reduced housing requirements, stating that the two should be in balance.
16. Another matter that stemmed directly from RSS was the debate about the Core Strategy's sustainable resources policy (Policy 27) which in line with the regional plan sought to promote the national sustainable building standards coupled with a proportion of energy to be captured from renewable and/or decentralised sources albeit set at higher targets in both respects. House builder interests argued against this on viability grounds. In line with discussions with Executive Members, Officers supported a compromise approach.
17. On various issues the Inspector encouraged the representors and Officers to explore, between hearing sessions, the scope for a comprise approach on policy or other text wordings. However apart from the housing policy the greatest difficulty to reach agreement was in terms of flexibilities and contingencies. The inspector cited provisions in national policy (PPS12) for alternative strategies to cover for the preferred strategy not proving to be deliverable. The Member approved Further Minor Changes identified a series of contingency options in a revised Performance Monitoring Framework but the Inspector has since suggested (in his first letter) more flexibility than this is needed.
18. On the morning of the final hearing day the Inspector announced he had 'grave doubts' he would be able to find the Core Strategy sound in respect of the housing requirements and thought that the RSS figures as minimum requirement should be cited in the policy. A separate report appears on this meeting's agenda on the implications of this announcement, which has been followed by two letters from the Inspector. It is important to note, however, that the Inspector intends to work with the Councils and other parties to amend the Core Strategy so that it may be found sound. In view of this, the examination hearings stage is incomplete: it will reconvene once proposed revisions have been prepared, consulted on and submitted to the Inspector in response to his requests.

There are no background papers to this report.

| Report Author | Tel | Email | Doc ID |
|---------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| David Porter | 01772 536775 | david.porter2@lancashire.gov.uk | JAC Report Sept 11 – Examination Outcomes |