

Report of	Meeting	Date
Executive Member Partnerships & Planning	Council	27 September 2011

CENTRAL LANCASHIRE CORE STRATEGY

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To set out the changes necessary to ensure the Core Strategy is found sound.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. To approve the proposed changes to Policies 1 and 4 of the Core Strategy (accepting any subsequent changes approved by South Ribble and/or Preston Councils specifically in respect of locations within their authority areas).
3. To grant delegated authority for the approval of other non-policy changes to the Executive Member for Partnerships and Planning.
4. To inform the Inspector of the Council's comments on the Draft National Planning Policy Framework when these have been completed in response to the national consultation exercise.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

5. The Inspector for the Core Strategy examination has made an announcement, and written two letters to Council Officers centred on the subject of housing delivery. His correspondence indicates that the Core Strategy is unsound as submitted in this respect and he has asked the Councils to take steps to remedy the situation, so that the Core Strategy may be found sound and be adopted as part of the development plan.
6. This report sets out and interprets the detail of the correspondence. It makes recommendations to ensure compliance with the Inspector's draft recommendations. One of the consequences of the Inspector's intervention is that the adoption of the Core Strategy will be delayed as further consultation and subsequent examination hearing time will be required.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

7. To approve in a manner consistent with the other Central Lancashire authorities what changes should be submitted to the examining Inspector.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

8. To not abide by the Inspector's suggestions. This would almost certainly lead to the Core Strategy being found unsound and not capable of being adopted. In fact the Inspector may well under such circumstances invite the authorities to withdraw the plan from the examination so significantly delaying its finalisation. The longer the period of time without an up to date development plan the greater is the risk that refused planning applications will be allowed on appeal and associated cost awarded to appellants.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

9. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Strong Family Support		Education and Jobs	
Being Healthy		Pride in Quality Homes and Clean Neighbourhoods	x
Safe Respectful Communities		Quality Community Services and Spaces	
Vibrant Local Economy		Thriving Town Centre, Local Attractions and Villages	
A Council that is a consistently Top Performing Organisation and Delivers Excellent Value for Money			x

BACKGROUND

10. In the autumn of 2010 when deciding the content of the Core Strategy for publication the Central Lancashire authorities took account of the Coalition Government's intention to revoke Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) and the economic circumstances depressing the delivery of, and demand for, new housing. The version approved for publication had lower than RSS housing requirement figures, at least for the short term, and a limited number of identified Strategic Sites/Locations.
11. The Core Strategy is now at its examination stage. Planning Inspector Richard Hollox has presided over eight hearing sessions between 28 June and 12 July 2011 as part of his task to decide whether the document is fit for purpose – 'sound'.
12. The Inspector announced at the final hearing session that he had 'very grave doubts' that the Core Strategy in its present form is sound in terms of its housing policies. He subsequently sent two letters to the authorities explaining his reasoning, and he suggested remedies. These letters are reproduced in Appendix 1 and 2 to this report. The letters cover the following issues:
- Housing requirements – the need to adopt the RSS figures
 - Increase and clarify opportunities to deliver enough housing development
 - Build in more flexibility to cater for potential problems with delivery in the future
 - Consider the possible implications of Draft National Planning Policy Framework

HOUSING REQUIREMENTS – POLICY 4

13. Although the Government still intends to revoke the Regional Spatial Strategies they remain in force because the necessary legislation (the Localism Act) is not yet in place and therefore the subsequent procedure to revoke the Strategies (which may be protracted)

cannot commence. In the meantime the courts have ruled that local development plans must be in general conformity with regional policy. This is why the Inspector is seeking the inclusion of the North West RSS housing figures within Policy 4 of the Core Strategy and to recognise that these are minimum figures as the RSS indicates they can be exceeded. (See Appendix 3). Therefore, we have no option but to conform.

14. The RSS figures start from 2003 and since that time there has been some under-provision of house building compared to the annual targets (162 units in Chorley Borough). Housing developer interests at the examination hearing argued this shortfall should be made up within a few years through higher short term targets. The Inspector sensibly states that 'it would be more realistic to expect this to take place fairly steadily throughout the plan period'. The proposed changes to Policy 4 reflect this. (See Appendix 3)
15. Members are reminded that it remains the intention to carry out a partial review of the Core Strategy, straight after it has been adopted, so that locally derived housing requirement figures can be introduced into it following the revocation of the RSS. This intention will be highlighted in the non-policy text changes.

INCREASE AND CLARIFY HOUSING DEVELOPMENT DELIVERY – POLICY 1 AND TABLE 1

16. The Inspector is of the view that as presently drafted the Core Strategy identifies insufficient land that can be delivered for housing development at the right time and in the right places. He is seeking additional Strategic Sites/Locations to be identified in the Core Strategy (in Policy 1) rather than leaving this to decisions in the Site Allocations documents and, taking such additional sites into account, show a clearer indication of the amounts of new housing to be delivered across all categories of places over the plan period (ie a revised Table 1- on page 42 of the plan).
17. Several sites have been proposed for inclusion in the Core Strategy by representors and the background evidence base work previously done to inform the Core Strategy content also assessed a range of contenders. Two broad locations previously considered for inclusion in the publication version of the Core Strategy are now considered appropriate in view of Inspector's concerns. These are:
 - a. Land to the South of Penwortham and North of Farington in the vicinity of Pickering's Farm.
 - b. Land at North West Preston - a broad sweep of land south of the M55 stretching from west of the Cottam area (which should now be made a more definite proposal as an allocated Strategic Site in view of its imminent establishment as a firm commitment), eastwards to the areas known as Bartle (east of Sandy Lane, north of Hoyles Lane / Lightfoot Lane, south of the M55), and extending east of the A6 to incorporate land north of Eastway / south of the M55. (See Appendix 3)
18. As these are both locations characterised by greenfield land the prospect of more than 70% of new housing being built on brownfield land would be less likely so it is proposed to delete the words (derived from RSS) of 'at least' from part (c) of Policy 4. However the opportunity can also be taken to clarify this part of the policy in terms of the provision of an appropriate range of house types. (See Appendix 3)
19. At the first hearing session the Inspector suggested two changes to Policy 1 – that brownfield sites should be 'well located' and that the character of 'rural' as well as suburban areas should be protected. These proposed revisions are also shown in Appendix 3.

BUILD IN MORE FLEXIBILITY

20. The Inspector considers the Core Strategy 'should be clear and robust on how it would handle contingencies' so as to cover for possible problems of delivery (particularly of housing development) in the future. Under existing delegated powers Executive Members from the three authorities have already approved proposed changes to the Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF) of the Core Strategy to set trigger levels to highlight performance not in line with key indicators and a range of contingency options to consider in such circumstances. These intentions can be more clearly sign posted in the Core Strategy itself. However over-provision of new housing cannot be used as a trigger (as the figures are minima) so this operation of the trigger needs to be removed from the PMF and Policy 4. Other than this, bearing in mind the proposed addition of two Strategic Locations, no further level of flexibility is considered necessary.

CONSIDER DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

21. This document was published for consultation after the examination hearing sessions and clearly its content is subject to change prior to being finalised. However its reference to '20% extra' housing is, we are now assured, applicable only to the amount of land that should be available in the forthcoming five years and not an addition to the total requirement figures. Aside from this, proposed policy changes cover a wide range of matters and it is appropriate that the Inspector sees the full extent of the authorities' views produced in response to the national consultation invitation to comment.
22. Representations have been made, supported by Chorley Council, that currently the Planning Inspectorate are placing too much emphasis on the draft NPPF and this must be changed.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES REQUIRED AND NEXT STEPS

23. Policies 1 and 4 need to be changed as set out in Appendix 3.
24. Delegated authority is sought to secure Executive Member approval of the non-policy change details of the Core Strategy in respect of the content of Table 1, a better explanation of the flexibility provisions and the necessary reasoned justification text revisions consequent to the changes to Policies 1 and 4.
25. Following approval of the changes these proposals will need to be consulted on and the representations received submitted to the Inspector. The examination process will then resume and this will probably include further hearing time. The Inspector will then complete his report to the authorities covering all his findings on housing and other matters. The final stage is adoption of the Core Strategy.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

26. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	
Legal	√	No significant implications in this area	

COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

27. The approach detailed within this report and the recommendation based upon this approach is appropriate to discharge the Council's obligations. Failure to take into account the Inspectors findings in relation to the Core Strategy would leave this document vulnerable to challenge and preclude its adoption.

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

Background Papers			
Document	Date	File	Place of Inspection
Draft National Planning Policy Framework	July 2011		Union Street Offices

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Lesley-Ann Fenton	5323	8 September 2011	CORE STRATEGY CHANGES Report