
Report of the Chief Planning Officer

Report to Joint Plans Panel

Date: 29th November 2018

Subject: Site Allocations Plan Update

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	☒ Yes	☐ No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): All		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	☒ Yes	☐ No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	☐ Yes	☒ No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	☐ Yes	☒ No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

Summary of main issues

1. The Site Allocations Plan (SAP) was considered by two independent inspectors at a public examination in October 2017 and July/August 2018. The initial submission of the SAP was in May 2017, with a revised submission in March 2018.
2. As part of the revised submission, the Council proposed protection from development for 33 sites in the green belt which had previously been identified as being the possible locations for 6,450 future homes. This proposal had been put forward reflecting the Council's desire to protect the green belt as much as possible, in light of a downward trajectory of overall housing need targets for the city based on the latest Government guidance and up to date evidence.
3. The two independent government-appointed inspectors, Claire Sherratt DIP URP MRTPI and Louise Gibbons BA Hons MRTPI, have issued interim views on the SAP which support the council's approach regarding green belt protection. They also address a procedural matter about moving the plan forward.

Recommendation

4. Joint Plans Panel is invited to note the Inspectors initial views on the Site Allocations Plan.

1 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members of Joint Plans Panel on progress on the Site Allocations Plan (SAP). The SAP Inspectors have released a post-hearing note and (following a letter from the Council seeking clarification) a further response, which together provide interim views on broad locations/green belt and offers guidance on the next steps. This is the first feedback received on the SAP and provides a positive way to move the process forward.

2 Background Information

- 2.1 The Leeds Core Strategy, which sets the strategic planning framework for Leeds, was adopted in November 2014 and this included a housing requirement of 70,000 (net) new homes between 2012 and 2028, of which 66,000 homes were to be identified as allocations through the Site Allocations Plan (SAP).
- 2.2 The initial submission of the SAP was in May 2017 and the process was paused between Stage 1 and Stage 2 to allow for amendments to the proposed release of land from the Green Belt. The initial direction from the Inspector was that the SAP should set out locations for future housing, as set down by the Core Strategy. The Council amended the housing element of the SAP so as to reflect lower overall housing targets on the basis of new evidence and the publication of revised Government consultation ('planning for the right homes in the right places') in September 2017.
- 2.3 The outcome of this amendment was to provide protection for 33 sites in the Green Belt, which had previously been identified as being the proposed allocated locations for 6,450 future homes. The Council identified these as "broad locations for future growth" (remaining in the Green Belt) so that it could both retain their Green Belt protection whilst identifying a pool of land for future development, which complied with the advice to meet land for 66,000 homes.
- 2.4 On 23 March 2018, the Council submitted a Revised Submission Draft Site Allocations Plan to the Secretary of State. It incorporated revisions to the Council's approach to strategic allocations for housing as outlined above. It included revised policies relating to housing allocations, broad locations, safeguarded land, phasing and associated explanatory text. The revised SAP was subject to consultation between 15 January and 26 February 2018 and all representations were considered and sent to the Inspector.
- 2.5 Stage 1 hearings covered allocations for employment, retail, greenspace and accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpersons and were held at the Civic Hall over 2 weeks during October 2017.
- 2.6 Stage 2 hearings covered all outstanding matters including housing and mixed-use allocations and were held at the Civic Hall over 4 weeks from 9th July until 3rd August 2018. The hearings involved 470 participants, 36 Council witnesses and up to 60 people "around the table" at any one time.
- 2.7 The inspectors provided clarity to participants about the manner in which they were examining the Plan through guidance notes on the Examination web-

site.

3 Main Issues

- 3.1 The SAP Inspectors have released a 'post-hearing note' and (following a letter from the Council seeking clarification) a 'further response', which together provide interim views on broad locations/green belt and offers guidance on the next steps. This is the first feedback received on the SAP and provides a positive way to move the process forward.
- 3.2 The initial views of the Inspectors are that the Council's approach to reducing Green Belt release, in light of the likely reduction in housing growth, was the correct one, and that:-
- given that national policy attaches great importance to the Green Belt and only envisages altering boundaries in exceptional circumstances, *significant* releases of land from the Green Belt would not be justified at this stage
 - it is clear that there is a lower trajectory of housing growth in Leeds because the Council's emerging work on housing need identifies a lower figure
 - to that end, *significant* releases of land from the Green Belt would not be justified at this stage
 - there remains uncertainty about what the need figure (and requirement) should be pending the examination of the Core Strategy Selective Review
 - it is pragmatic and sound to only provide housing supply, including any Green belt release required for years 1 to 11
 - the Plan should be subject to a review process, to bring it in line with the Core Strategy Selective Review, no later than 31st March 2023
- 3.3 In effect, and following on from their initial thoughts at the hearing sessions the Inspectors have also indicated that broad locations in the SAP would not be justified and have asked the Council to carry out further work to remove these from the plan (and retain the land as Green Belt) along with the removal of any references to phasing. At this stage all other allocations for housing would remain as proposed.
- 3.4 The Inspectors have stated that they remain keen to ensure no unnecessary delays at this juncture and have clarified the procedure moving forward. The initial part of the Inspector's post-hearing note raises and deals with a procedural matter; the impact of which requires the Council to re-present the amendments contained in the revised submission plan as main modifications to the initial submission plan (May 2017).
- 3.5 Following the completion of technical work by the City Council on agreed actions from the hearings sessions and the compilation of draft Main Modifications (comprising two components: a. modifications arising from the

hearing sessions and actions requested by the Inspector, and b. modifications as a result of the Inspector's post-hearing note, which require a re-presentation of the plan), the Council is awaiting further advice from the Inspector on any additional Main Modifications.

- 3.6 It should be emphasised that at this stage the Inspectors have provided no findings on specific sites, regarding soundness or the need for alternatives. Should they provide any further views on specific sites they will be asking the Council to find alternatives within the same HMCA, as was specified at the hearing sessions.

Next Steps

- 3.7 The main modifications are currently being considered by the Inspector and the City Council has emphasised the need for urgency in moving the process forward. These, alongside any modifications they recommend, will be subject to a six week period of public consultation, following approval by Executive Board in due course. At this stage, it is envisaged consultation is likely to take place in January/February, followed by receipt of the Inspector's report, once the Inspectors have considered representations on the Main Modifications.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1 Further main modifications recommended by the Inspector to make the Plan sound will be advertised for a 6 week period for further comment.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 In the preparation of the SAP, due regard has been given to Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration issues. This has included the completion of EDCI Screening of the SAP and meeting the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, which has meant that these Plans are subject to the preparation of a Sustainability Appraisal. The purpose of such Appraisals is to assess (and where appropriate strengthen) the document's policies, in relation to a series of social (and health), environmental and economic objectives. As part of this process, issues of Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration, are embedded as part of the Appraisal's objectives. The SAP material follows on and reflects the approach set out in the Core Strategy, which has also had the same regard to these issues. Further consultation on a sustainability appraisal of identified sites was agreed with the Inspectors during the hearings.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The Site Allocations Plan plays a key strategic role in taking forward the spatial and land use elements of the Vision for Leeds and the aspiration to be 'the Best City in the UK'. Related to this overarching approach and in addressing a range of social, environmental and economic objectives, the Plan seeks to implement key City Council priorities. These include the Best Council Plan (2018/19 – 2020/21) (in particular priorities relating to Health and Wellbeing,

Inclusive Growth, Safe Strong Communities, Culture, Child Friendly City, Housing (of the right quality, type, tenure and affordability in the right places) and 21st century infrastructure) and Leeds Inclusive Growth Strategy 2018 – 2023 (concerning getting people to benefit from the economy to their full potential). Once adopted, the Plan will form part of the overall development plan for Leeds, alongside the Core Strategy, the Aire Valley Leeds Area Action Plan and the Natural Resources and Waste Plan and any made neighbourhood plans.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The preparation of the statutory Local Plan is a necessary but a very resource intensive process. This is due to the time and cost of document preparation (relating to public consultation and engagement), the preparation and monitoring of an extensive evidence base, legal advice and Independent Examination. These challenges are compounded currently by the financial constraints upon the public sector and resourcing levels, concurrent with new technical and planning policy pressures arising from more recent legislation (including the Community Infrastructure Levy and Localism Act). There are considerable demands for officers, members and the community in taking the Development Plan process forward.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 The SAP follows the statutory Development Plan process (Local Plan) and has been prepared in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 as well as the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 Without current allocations Plans for Leeds MD in place, aspects of the existing UDP allocations will become out of date and will not reflect or deliver the Core Strategy Policies and proposals (including District wide requirements for Housing and General Employment Land) or the requirements of national planning guidance. Early delivery is therefore essential to enable the Council to demonstrate that sufficient land will be available when needed to meet the Core Strategy targets. The more the work progresses, the more material weight can be given to it. In addition, the Government is intervening in authorities without Plans in place.
- 4.6.2 The latest correspondence from the Inspector clarifies the process moving forward which reduces the risk to the Council of delay.

5 **Conclusions**

- 5.1 The Inspectors' interim views provide a welcome and practical clarification on the procedure moving forward and on the status of broad locations in the SAP. They are as follows:
- the Council's approach to avoiding release of Green Belt in light of lowering housing need, instead of meeting full Core Strategy targets, was the right one

- in continuing to protect Green Belt the Council doesn't now need to designate Broad Locations and these should be removed from the Plan

5.2 The Council is now waiting for the Inspectors to determine and recommend Main Modification to the Plan they require to make it sound and then, following to resolution of Executive Board in due course, they will be subject to further public consultation. Following the consultation exercise, the Inspectors will issue their final report on the Plan and recommend it, subject to the Main Modifications, as sound and capable of adoption

6 Recommendation

6.1 Joint Plans Panel is invited to note the Inspectors initial views on the Site Allocations Plan.