

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub-Committee

DATE: 2 April 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment

SUBJECT: Draft Southern Widnes Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) - Approval for Statutory Period of Public Consultation

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the publication of the draft Southern Widnes Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the purposes of statutory public consultation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The draft Southern Widnes Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix A) be approved for the purposes of statutory public consultation for a six week period;**
- 2) The comments received at the stakeholder consultation stage, as set out in the Statement of Consultation (Appendix C) and responses to them are noted;**
- 3) Further editorial and technical amendments that do not materially affect the content of the SPD be agreed by the Operational Director - Environmental & Regulatory Services in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration and Renewal, as necessary, before the document is published for public consultation; and**
- 4) The results of the public consultation exercise and consequent recommended modifications to the draft document be reported back to the Executive Board for resolution to adopt as a Supplementary Planning Document.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy

- 3.1 The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (2008) is an important element of the Mersey Gateway Project that builds upon the adopted vision that it is '*more than just a bridge*' but the '*catalyst*' for regeneration and investment throughout Halton, Cheshire, the Liverpool City Region and the North West.
- 3.2 The Regeneration Strategy is concerned with how the bridge can deliver a new context for place-shaping, set the agenda for a sustained economic, social, physical and environmental regeneration programme over the next 20 to 30 years and reconnect the communities of Runcorn and Widnes.
- 3.3 The Regeneration Strategy covers an area in excess of 20 square kilometres within the Borough of Halton, including the Southern Widnes SPD area. The area was agreed with the Council to provide a statutory planning basis for policy development due to its influence on the Local Development Framework.
- 3.4 Several key elements of this SPD have been informed by the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, building upon some of the principles, objectives and development opportunities set out within the document. A number of proposals described in this SPD are therefore based upon the preferred option as expressed in the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy agreed by the Councils Executive Board on 19th June 2008.

Purpose of the Southern Widnes SPD

- 3.5 Southern Widnes has been identified within the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (2005) as one of the 6 Action Areas in the Borough that requires significant development or redevelopment in order to secure their regeneration. This SPD is therefore supplementary to policy RG1 (Action Area 1 Southern Widnes) in the Halton UDP.
- 3.6 Southern Widnes has also been identified as an Action Area for regeneration and development within the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (2008) as a result of the long-term opportunities that the Mersey Gateway Project presents. These opportunities are principally facilitated through the de-linking, or downgrading, of existing road transport infrastructure associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge. This would result in some areas of land becoming available for development and enabling the existing road infrastructure into Southern Widnes to be improved.
- 3.7 The purpose of the Southern Widnes SPD is therefore to establish and identify potential development or improvement opportunities within the area that arise from the existing context and the proposals of the Mersey Gateway Project in order to help sustain the existing community and

deliver regeneration benefits to the area. This current draft has been prepared by GVA Grimley for the formal stages of public consultation.

- 3.8 The Southern Widnes SPD is specifically designed to:
- Ensure a suitable standard of development;
 - Improve the visual and environmental quality of the area;
 - Create a 'sense of place';
 - Improve accessibility particularly to the Silver Jubilee Bridge and Widnes Waterfront; and
 - Improve sustainability of the West Bank community by introducing new employment, housing and a neighbourhood centre.

Sustainability Appraisal – Appendix B

- 3.4 Waterman Environmental were appointed by Halton Borough Council to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Southern Widnes SPD in order to meet the requirements of planning legislation and regulations. The main purpose of SA (the combined SEA and SA process) is to test whether implementation of the SPD is likely to have any significant environmental, social or economic effects.
- 3.5 The SA Framework developed for the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy incorporated the Southern Widnes area as one of the key focal points for regeneration and development. It was therefore considered that the SA Framework developed for the Regeneration Strategy would be applicable to the SA of the Southern Widnes SPD.
- 3.6 Key issues and SA objectives for the Southern Widnes area that emerged both from the existing context and the proposals of the Mersey Gateway Project were consulted upon in July 2007. The comments and responses can be found in Appendix D of the Southern Widnes SPD SA.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 3.7 Required under the European Community Habitats Directive, a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) must be undertaken when a project or plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects).
- 3.8 A HRA Screening Report was produced in May 2008 as part of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, which covers the Southern Widnes SPD area. The HRA Screening Report is available upon request.

Statement of Consultation – Appendix C

- 3.7 The requirements of the planning system states that a record be kept of any consultees, their comments, and how they have been taken into account throughout the production of an SPD.

- 3.8 An informal draft of the Southern Widnes SPD was circulated between 17th December 2008 and 12th January 2009 to key stakeholders to comment on the appropriateness of the document's content prior to the formal public consultation process. A list of those consulted, comments received and how these were taken into account is contained within the draft Statement of Consultation (Appendix C of this report).

Next Steps

- 3.9 The SA report, HRA and the draft Statement of Consultation will be made available during the six week formal period of public consultation, alongside the draft Southern Widnes SPD.
- 3.10 Once the formal public consultation exercise has been conducted, the responses will be recorded and taken into account. It is intended that a further report will then be taken to Executive Board, seeking formal adoption of the revised Southern Widnes SPD.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The SPD when adopted will form part of the Local Development Framework for Halton. The development opportunities set out within this SPD are therefore complementary to relevant saved policies of the UDP and other relevant Council SPDs.
- 4.2 Once adopted the content of the SPD will be a material consideration for the determination of any applicable planning application and so provide Halton Borough Council with greater detail and certainty to control and guide new development within the defined Southern Widnes boundary.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No other implications

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

Children and Young People in Halton

- 6.1 The SPD will help to ensure that children and young people in Southern Widnes grow up and thrive in safe environments and communities.

Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

- 6.2 Providing locally accessible employment opportunities is recognised in the SPD as a vital component of the redevelopment of Southern Widnes.

A Healthy Halton

- 6.3 The SPD is intended to facilitate the development of a safe, attractive and healthy community that incorporates opportunities for recreation and healthy travel options.

A Safer Halton

- 6.4 The SPD seeks to ensure that Southern Widnes contributes to a Safer Halton by creating and sustaining environments that are well designed, well maintained, safe and valued.

Halton's Urban Renewal

- 6.5 The redevelopment of Southern Widnes is fundamental to Halton's urban renewal. The emerging policy content of the SPD will aid the transformation of Southern Widnes's urban fabric, develop safe and attractive public spaces and create a dynamic and high quality mixed-use environment which will play a significant role in the area's regeneration.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 No legal or financial risks to the Council can be identified so long as the statutory procedures for the preparation of SPDs are met.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 There are no identifiable equality and diversity implications contained in the SPD.

9.0 REASON (S) FOR DECISION

- 9.1 These are set out in Section 3, Supporting Information.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 10.1 This has been covered by the preparation process of the Halton Unitary Development Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

- 11.1 The SPD will be effective from the date of adoption by the Council's Executive Board.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

| Document | Place of Inspection | Contact Officer |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005) | Rutland House | Andrew Pannell |
| Statement of Community Involvement (2006) | Rutland House | Neil MacFarlane |
| Draft Runcorn Town Centre Strategy (2007) | Rutland House | Alasdair Cross |
| Local Development Scheme (2007) | Rutland House | Neil MacFarlane |
| Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (2008) | Rutland House | Andrew Pannell |
| Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy Habitats Regulations Assessment (2008) | Rutland House | Andrew Pannell |