

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 9 September 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment

SUBJECT: Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options Document for Public Consultation

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report seeks to gain the approval of the Executive Board of the content of the Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options document, in order that the document is approved for a six-week period of public consultation from 24th September to 5th November 2009.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options document be approved for the purposes of a six-week period of public consultation;
- (2) Further editorial and technical amendments that do not materially affect the content of the Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options document be agreed by the Operational Director - Environmental and 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
- (3) The results of the statutory public consultation exercise on the Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options document are reported back to the Executive Board following the consultation period.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Halton Local Development Framework

3.1 The Halton Local Development Framework will replace the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The Halton UDP was adopted in April 2005 to provide the planning framework for determining development proposals in the Borough, containing policies and proposals for the development of land and buildings. The majority of

the UDP policies, along with its Proposals Map, were “saved” by agreement of the Secretary of State, in 2008 and hence continue to perform the role of the adopted development plan for Halton.

- 3.2 In 2004, with the introduction of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (the 2004 Act), the process for producing development plans fundamentally changed. A new style of “spatial plans” was introduced by Government, with the purposes of providing the means to take forward the elements of the Council’s Sustainable Community Strategy that relate to the physical development and use of land in Halton. Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning, bringing together and integrating policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the creation of places and how they function.
- 3.3 The name of the portfolio of spatial plans which, are to be produced under the 2004 Act is the Local Development Framework (LDF). Ultimately, the LDF will replace the Saved Policies of the UDP and become the adopted development plan for Halton. Unlike the UDP, which is a single Borough-wide document, the LDF is a collection of several documents, which individually can cover either the whole Borough or only parts of it. However, collectively, they will continue to provide a Borough-wide planning framework.
- 3.4 Among the different types of document which form the LDF are the following:
 - **Development Plan Documents (DPDs):** These are the most important documents within the LDF, containing policies which will be part of the development plan for the Borough and are subject to independent examination. DPDs deal with major issues such as site allocations and development management policies. The Core Strategy is the most important DPD and the first to be produced in Halton, in addition to the Joint Merseyside Waste DPD which is being produced with other local authorities. Subsequently, several others will be produced in coming years.
 - **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs):** SPDs provide more detailed policy guidance about planning issues, and can be theme-based or relate to a specific area. SPDs are not part of the development plan and are not subject to independent examination, but play a crucial role in providing supporting policy guidance. The Council has adopted many SPDs, which are supplementary to the UDP polices, and more are scheduled to be completed.
 - **Local Development Scheme (LDS):** The LDS sets out what DPDs and SPDs the Council proposes to prepare, and also which UDP policies it proposes to continue to save. The Council’s up-to-date LDS was published in March 2009.

- **Statement of Community Involvement (SCI):** The 2004 Act brought stronger requirements for community involvement in spatial planning. An emphasis is placed on the need to engage communities early on in producing new plans, so called “front loading” of the process, and that consultation should be continuous. The SCI sets out how the Council intends to achieve continuous community involvement in the preparation of DPDs and SPDs.
- **Annual Monitoring Report (AMR):** The AMR shows how the Council’s planning functions are performing against all relevant targets and indicators. The AMR also highlights what changes the Council may need to make to their LDF to improve its performance.
- **Saved Policies of the UDP:** While DPDs are being prepared; the UDP policies and proposals map play an important role in providing development plan policies for the Borough. As DPDs are produced and their policies adopted, the UDP will be gradually replaced with more up-to-date policies.

3.5 The 2004 Act also introduced a new system of spatial plans at the regional level, known as Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). The policies contained within these documents have a new role: they are now part of the development plan, which means that they must be taken into consideration in the local development management process. The RSS for the North West region was adopted in 2008, and has since performed a complementary role to the saved UDP policies as part of Halton’s adopted development plan. As the RSS is part of the development plan, it has been important to ensure that the Core Strategy Preferred Options document does not repeat RSS content and is broadly in conformity with its policies.

Purpose of the Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options Document

3.6 The purpose of the Core Strategy is to provide the overarching spatial planning framework for Halton until 2026. In setting the overarching framework, the Core Strategy will influence subsequent LDF documents to be produced.

3.7 Under the 2004 Act, the production of a DPD must involve several important stages of preparation. This “Preferred Options” stage represents the second crucial stage in document preparation, and follows from the “Issues and Options” papers, which were subject to public consultation in 2006. These Issues and Options papers presented broad spatial options for the development of Halton, and contained a discussion of the issues, which could be dealt with within the Core Strategy. The Preferred Options document represents a significant step forwards in Core Strategy preparation, drawing on the results of the Issues and Options consultation, new legislation, regulations and guidance, and extensive evidence base preparation, to

set out the Council's preferred policy options for the development of the Borough.

- 3.8 It is important to remember that the Preferred Options document is a public consultation document and has been prepared as such: the document includes potential "alternative" policy options, which have not been chosen, but that the public are still able to comment on. The purpose of the document is to provide an opportunity for all respondents to consider what the Council's preferred approach is, and to voice their opinion as to whether this is the best approach. Responses received will be taken into account at the next stage of Core Strategy preparation.
- 3.9 Preferred Options is the stage of consultation on the Core Strategy, which directly precedes the preparation of a "Publication" version of the document. This Publication document will eventually be submitted to the Secretary of State and examined by a Government-appointed Planning Inspector. This Inspector will determine whether the Core Strategy is "sound" and meets various legal requirements, and hence is appropriate for adoption by the Council as part of its development plan. "Soundness" is of paramount importance in DPD preparation, and involves the consideration of several factors (as set out in the Government's Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning), which it is important to take account of at each stage of Core Strategy preparation.
- 3.10 A Core Strategy must meet legal requirements to ensure that it:
- Has been prepared in accordance with the LDS and in compliance with the SCI and the Regulations;
 - Has been subject to Sustainability Appraisal;
 - Has regard to national policy;
 - Conforms generally to the RSS; and
 - Has regard to any Sustainable Community Strategy for its area.
- 3.11 In order to meet soundness requirements, a Core Strategy must be justified, effective and consistent with national policy. "Justified" means that the document must be founded on a robust and credible evidence base and the most appropriate strategy when considered against the reasonable alternatives. "Effective" means that the document must be deliverable, flexible and able to be monitored.

Preparation of the Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options Document

- 3.12 The production of the Preferred Options document has involved the completion of several important tasks, which were required to ensure that the Core Strategy is of high quality and accurately reflects the needs and aspiration of Halton's communities, and also to ensure that legal and soundness requirements could be met. Chief among these

tasks has been the collation of a comprehensive “evidence base” of background studies and research, which has been used in developing a detailed understanding of the issues and challenges affecting the Borough. Extensive research has been undertaken into the national, regional and local policy context, to ensure that the document is in conformity with the existing and emerging policy framework. In addition, it has been important to ensure that guidance on Core Strategy Preferred Options preparation has been adhered to, including that published by national government, notably Communities and Local Government, and also that published by agencies such as the Planning Advisory Service (PAS).

- 3.13 The Preferred Options document has not been produced by the Council’s Planning Officers in isolation: the nature of the Core Strategy means that it will have implications across the Council and it has been extremely important to ensure that it performs well as a Corporate document. Positive contributions have been made from officers within all service areas. A series of meetings of a Core Strategy Officer Steering Group, whose membership included senior officers from many of the service areas and was chaired by the Chief Executive, was central in gathering these contributions. In addition, the Local Development Framework Working Party has been heavily involved in document preparation, meeting several times to discuss policy content and provide feedback. Preparation of the Core Strategy has also benefitted from consultation with the PAS Spatial Planning Peers service, and also from discussions with advisors at Government Office for the North West.

Structure of the Halton Core Strategy Preferred Options Document

- 3.14 The Preferred Options document, which is proposed to be published for public consultation, is attached to this report at Appendix 1. The content of the document and the role of its individual sections is summarised in the following paragraphs. It should be borne in mind that the document has been prepared in accordance with the legal requirements and soundness considerations, and also in accordance with various policy and guidance documents published by national government.
- 3.15 The Preferred Options document begins with a Foreword and Introduction (Chapter 1), which introduce the document and explain its role and function in more detail. Chapter 2: Key Issues, Challenges and Opportunities provide an overview of the characteristics of Halton, and the issues and challenges facing the Borough as a place to live and work. This document then goes on in Chapter 3 to set out the Council’s preferred Mission Statement, Visions and Strategic Objectives for Halton. The preferred Spatial Strategy and the preferred policy options for achieving its delivery are set out in Chapter 4, including policy guidance for the areas of Halton subject to most change over the plan period, known as the Key Areas of Change. It

also sets out alternative approaches for spatial planning policies, which have been considered but not taken forward.

- 3.16 The remainder of the policy content of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document is set out in Chapters 5-10, within “spatial themes”:
- A Decent Home and Neighbourhood
 - A Vibrant Economy and Attractive Centres
 - Healthy, Inclusive and Sustainable Communities
 - A High Quality Built and Green Environment
 - An Accessible Halton
 - Responsive Infrastructure and Sustainable Resources
- 3.20 The document also contains a section explaining how the performance of the Core Strategy Preferred Options can be monitored over the plan period (Chapter 11). Finally, an extensive Glossary and list of acronyms used is included at Chapter 12.

Supporting Information

- 3.21 The Core Strategy Preferred Options document is a long document. This is due in part to the vast range of topics which it covers, the need to explain specialist terms and policy development processes, and also because it is a consultation document, and therefore needs to contain explanations of alternative approaches considered. In order to make the document more accessible, a non-technical, summary document has been produced, highlighting the key messages of the document, stating where a full copy can be found, and explaining how representations on its content can be made. This summary document is aimed at reaching the wider public, and engaging non-specialists in the Core Strategy process.
- 3.22 The preparation of the Preferred Options document has involved a great deal of work over and above the preparation of the document itself. The document will be published for public consultation alongside a variety of supporting documents. Explanations of the roles of these supporting documents are as follows:
- **A. Infrastructure Plan:** Core Strategies need to be supported by detail of what infrastructure will be provided in the local authority area, and in neighbouring areas, over the plan period. In Infrastructure Plan sets out the major infrastructure projects (physical, social and environmental), which are planned by the Council, its partners and third party agencies, detailing delivery mechanisms, timescales and funding for these projects.
 - **B. Legal Requirements and Soundness Checklist:** As explained earlier, it is helpful to consider at each stage of Core Strategy preparation the legal and soundness requirements, which will need to be met if the Core Strategy is to be adopted by the Council. This

checklist indicates how consideration of these requirements has been incorporated into the Preferred Options document, and will serve as a useful reference during the preparation of the Publication document.

- **C. Schedule of Unitary Development Plan Policies to be Replaced:** This schedule shows which of the Saved UDP policies would be expected to be replaced, if the preferred policy options were adopted by the Council. The schedule serves a useful purpose in indicating how the Core Strategy policies and the UDP policies will be able to work together as a comprehensive development plan for Halton.
- **D. Evidence Base and Monitoring Documents:** This document lists all of the evidence base documents used and referred to in the preparation of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document. Also included in the schedule is a list of all of the monitoring documents produced during the preparation of the document.
- **E. Policy Documents:** This list is a summary of all of the national, regional and local policy and legislation which formed the policy framework for the preparation of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document, including details of who published them, when they were published and where they can be found online.
- **F. Sustainability Appraisal (SA):** This important document serves to meet the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive for DPD preparation, incorporating environmental considerations into an appraisal of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document in terms of its social, economic and environmental sustainability. The results and recommendations of the SA of the Preferred Options will be taken into account during the preparation of the Core Strategy Publication document.
- **G. Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA):** This document serves to meet the requirements of the HRA Directive for DPD preparation. The document incorporates the first stage of the HRA, known as “screening”, which has shown that an “Appropriate Assessment” (HRA stages 2 and 3) will be required to assess the impacts of the Core Strategy on European wildlife sites at the Publication stage of preparation of the document.
- **H. Health Impact Assessment (HIA):** A rapid HIA was undertaken on the Preferred Options document to ascertain the impacts of the preferred policies on the issue of health in Halton. The rapid assessment indicated that there was no need for a “full”, more detailed HIA to be undertaken, as the policies were not anticipated to have any major detrimental effects on health. The recommendations of the report will be taken into consideration during the preparation of the Core Strategy Publication document.

- **I. Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA):** An EqIA was undertaken on the Preferred Options document to understand its potential impacts on Halton's diverse communities, including minority and vulnerable groups. The recommendations of the resulting report will be taken into consideration during the preparation of the Core Strategy Publication document.
- **J. Statement of Consultation:** This document summarises the responses received from the Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation, and highlights how these have been taken into account in the drafting of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document.

Public Consultation

- 3.23 It is proposed that the Preferred Options document be published for a six-week period of public consultation, commencing on 24th September and ending on 5th November 2009. This period of public consultation will satisfy the Council's obligation to undertake consultation during the preparation of a DPD, in line with the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008, and is also in accordance with the measures set out within the Council's adopted SCI.
- 3.24 An extensive consultation plan has been prepared, and a number of methods will be employed with the aim of ensuring that the Core Strategy document reaches as many interested parties as possible. This will include the use of the non-technical summary document discussed in paragraph 3.21. The Council's marketing and communications functions have played an important role in the planning of the consultation activities. Examples of methods to be employed include (please note that this is not a comprehensive list):
- **Use of the LDF Consultation Database:** A comprehensive database has been created, over a number of years, of people and companies with an interest in the Halton LDF. This includes statutory consultees (i.e. those the Council must consult on the content of DPDs), and business and individuals with an interest in the LDF as a whole, or with an interest in a particular LDF document, such as the Core Strategy DPD. These parties will be sent a letter or e-mail informing them of the publication of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document for public consultation, and of how they will be able to comment.
 - **Consultation Branding:** A distinctive Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation graphic layout has been established, with the tagline of "Your Halton, Your Vision, Your Thoughts", aimed at engaging the public and businesses with the process. The branding, which will also feature on the front page of the consultation

document itself, will be replicated at the Publication stage of Core Strategy preparation and will also be used during public consultation on other LDF documents.

- **Public Exhibitions and Posters:** Officers have scheduled a number of exhibitions for the consultation period, to take place at key town centre locations. Posters stating information about the consultation will also be hosted at Council buildings, including libraries, and in other key locations.
- **Online Materials and Deposit Locations:** Information about the Core Strategy Preferred Options consultation, including copies of the document and its supporting material, will be available online and in a number of deposit locations in Halton, including the Halton Direct Links and libraries.
- **In Touch / Inside Halton Magazines:** These publications are being used to publicise the Preferred Options consultation among Council staff and Halton residents respectively.

Next Steps

- 3.25 Subsequent to the period of public consultation on the Core Strategy Preferred Options document and the collation and consideration of representations made, the team will begin work on the Core Strategy Publication document. This will be the final stage of significant preparation of the Core Strategy. The Publication document will be published for a six-week consultation period, where representations will be able to be made, however, these may only relate to issues of soundness of the DPD.
- 3.26 The preparation of the Publication document is due to commence in November 2009, with it being published for consultation in September 2010. Following this period and the completion of any changes to the document, the Core Strategy will be submitted to the Secretary of State in December 2010. The subsequent public examination of the document due to commence in April 2010.
- 3.27 Following the public examination, and taking into consideration the Inspector's Binding Report, it is anticipated that the Council will adopt the Core Strategy in October 2011.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Core Strategy is the central policy document within the Halton LDF, the folder of plans and strategies that will eventually replace the Halton UDP. The Core Strategy is more than a planning document: it is a significant corporate policy document and as such, it will have widespread policy implications for the Council and its partners.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 A Healthy Halton

The Core Strategy Preferred Options document contains a wide variety of policy content focussed on addressing the Borough's health problems; hence the priority for a healthier Halton is strongly reflected across a number of the preferred policy options. Approaches notable for their consideration and impact upon health priorities include those within the "Healthy, Inclusive and Sustainable Communities" theme, but there are also efforts to address health problems through the maintenance of well-designed places and spaces, through the support of accessible sustainable travel options and through the provision of a healthy, green local environment.

5.2 Halton's Urban Renewal

Through the identification of Key Areas of Change, the Core Strategy highlights areas, which will be subject to urban renewal, either on a local scale in association with the Neighbourhood Priority Areas, or on a larger scale in association with some of the major development projects affecting the Borough over the plan period. The Core Strategy Preferred Options also cater for the renewal and enhancement of the Borough's green and built environment, with a particular focus on housing areas, employment land and the Borough's centres.

5.3 Children and Young People in Halton

A significant component of the content of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document is aimed at raising aspirations of younger people and supporting the provision of opportunities for them to enter higher education and employment. The Preferred Policy Options aim to safeguard and enhance learning opportunities through the protection and improvement of physical infrastructure associated with educational establishments, as well as supporting the plans and policies of the Council's learning partners. Preferred Policy Options also address the need to encourage and provide opportunities for children and younger people to access and participate in physically active, healthy lifestyles.

5.4 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

One of the main thrusts of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document is to support the maintenance and enhancement of the Borough's economy and hence to support economic growth. This includes the enhancement of local employment opportunities, as well as support for learning and skill development opportunities at the Borough's educational establishments and workplaces. The Core Strategy also aims to consolidate and enhance linkages to the wider sub-region and delivers the economic benefits of Halton's strategic location and facilities to the Borough's residents and businesses.

5.5 A Safer Halton

Making Halton safer is a key consideration for the Core Strategy Preferred Options Document aiming to ensure that Halton's communities, businesses and visitors enjoy access to a safe and sustainable physical environment with natural and man-made risks and hazards being minimised. A number of preferred policies within the document therefore seek to create and sustain safer environments, which are well designed, well built, well maintained and valued by all members of society.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 At this current stage of policy development it is important to ensure that the document meets the Government imposed legal requirements and tests of soundness for DPDs, so that the Core Strategy can progress towards adoption. This will be documented as supporting information to the document to ensure and demonstrate compliance.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 7.1 An integral part of the Core Strategy Preferred Options document is to support a socially inclusive environment that takes into account Halton's diverse communities by breaking down unnecessary barriers and exclusions in a manner that benefits the entire Borough. The EqIA demonstrates whether the preferred policies have any significant implications for Halton's communities and ways that these potential effects should be mitigated.

8.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

- 8.1 Under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, the production of a DPD must involve several important stages of preparation. This "Preferred Options" stage of the Core Strategy represents the second crucial stage in document preparation, and follows from the "Issues and Options" papers, which were subject to public consultation in 2006.

9.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 9.1 This is a statutory step of plan making that is defined in law and as such there are no alternative options available.

10.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

- 10.1 This decision will be implemented via a public consultation held between the 24th September and 5th November 2009.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Saved Policies of the Halton Unitary Development Plan	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Andrew Pannell
Halton Core Strategy Issues and Options Documents	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Andrew Pannell
Halton Local Development Scheme	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Andrew Pannell
Adopted Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Andrew Pannell
Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning	Planning & Policy Division, Rutland House	Andrew Pannell