

Title of Report:	Core Strategy: Proposed Focused Changes
Report to be considered by:	Council
Date of Meeting:	31 January 2011
Forward Plan Ref:	C2215

Purpose of Report: To recommend the schedule of post-examination proposed focused changes to the West Berkshire Core Strategy for approval by Council

Recommended Action: That Council Resolves that:

1. the schedule of post-examination proposed focused changes to the submission Core Strategy are published in accordance with Regulation 30 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Amendment regulations 2008 for a 6 week period of consultation.
2. Delegated authority is given to the Head of Planning and Countryside in consultation with the Portfolio member for Planning and Housing to agree any non-material supporting documentation and any other non-material refinements to the policy wording before consultation.
3. The Council disagrees with the 'Proposed Inspector Change' to Policy CS16 (Sustainable Construction and Energy Efficiency) and will so inform the Inspector during the consultation period. The Council strongly recommends policy CS16 to remain substantially unchanged.

Reason for decision to be taken: Following the suspension of the Core Strategy examination in November 2010, further work has been carried out at the request of the Inspector. This has resulted in some changes to the wording of the Core Strategy as submitted.

Key background documentation: Submission Core Strategy
Inspector's Post Hearing Notes 1 and 2

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Plan Priority:

- CPP3 – Reduce West Berkshire’s carbon footprint** – to reduce CO₂ emissions in West Berkshire and contribute to waste management, green travel, transportation and energy efficiency

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Plan Theme(s):

- CPT1 - Better Roads and Transport**
- CPT2 - Thriving Town Centres**
- CPT3 - Affordable Housing**
- CPT4 - High Quality Planning**
- CPT5 - Cleaner and Greener**
- CPT6 - Vibrant Villages**
- CPT7 - Safer and Stronger Communities**
- CPT8 - A Healthier Life**
- CPT9 - Successful Schools and Learning**
- CPT12 - Including Everyone**

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Plan Priorities and Themes by:

Setting a positive framework for the future planning of West Berkshire

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Alan Law - Tel (01491) 873614
E-mail Address:	alaw@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	25/01/2011
Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Liz Alexander
Job Title:	Planning Policy Team Leader
Tel. No.:	01635 519512
E-mail Address:	lalexander@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy: The West Berkshire Core Strategy sets out the strategic direction for the Council's planning policy, setting out the broad strategy for development in West Berkshire to 2026.

Financial:

Personnel:

Legal/Procurement:

Property:

Risk Management:

Equalities Impact Assessment: An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out in tandem with the development of the Core Strategy..

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Commission or associated	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Executive Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report asks full Council to approve the proposed focused changes to the submission Core Strategy. These are the outcome of additional work on the Core Strategy which was necessary following the suspension of the Examination in November.
- 1.2 The Core Strategy examination began on 2 November 2010 and ran for 8 days. Under guidance from the Inspector, the Council asked for a suspension to the Examination at the end of the scheduled hearings to enable the Council to consider matters that had arisen from the discussions. The Examination was suspended on 11 November to enable the Council time to undertake the extra work that the Inspector had asked for.
- 1.3 The substantive structure and direction of the Core Strategy in terms of the spatial strategy, including the settlement hierarchy, the 4 spatial areas and the 2 strategic sites at Newbury Racecourse and Sandford Park, have not been questioned by the Inspector and are therefore not the subject of these proposed changes to the Core Strategy.
- 1.4 The Inspector published 2 post hearing notes (available from <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=20791>) setting out matters highlighted in discussions at the hearings, with further work suggested for the Council to undertake. The main areas are set out in section 2, together with the outcome of the work, and the implications for the Core Strategy in terms of whether any changes were needed, and whether these were focused or minor changes.
- 1.5 Any focused changes require consultation under regulation 30 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008. A schedule of responses will then be prepared and sent to the Inspector. Comments can only be made on proposed focused changes to the Core Strategy – not on the rest of the document.
- 1.6 The Examination will then resume to allow the additional information to be examined. This resumption needs to take place within 6 months of the date of the suspension of the Examination i.e. by 11 May 2011. The Inspector has indicated that in terms of his timescales, the Examination process could resume on 2 May, with further hearing sessions to be held in late June/early July.
- 1.7 Any minor amendments do not require consultation. The consultation schedule of focused changes is supported by a topic paper which is attached as Appendix B. This provides background information to explain the changes made. A sustainability appraisal has been carried out on the focused changes and this is available on request.
- 1.8 Full Council is asked to approve the schedule of proposed focused changes which is attached as Appendix A.

2. Main Matters Raised by the Inspector and Outcomes of Work to Date

Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE)

- 2.1 The Inspector was concerned that the Core Strategy in its submitted form did not sufficiently take into account the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate (HSE NII) position with regard to AWE at Aldermaston and Burghfield. The Inspector requested that the HSE NII provides clear information about the amount of development and additional population which can be accommodated in each zone. He was particularly keen to know whether there is any constraint in development in and around Burghfield Common and Mortimer, and what, if any capacity there is for development in these 2 rural service centres.
- 2.2 A detailed response has now been received from the HSE NII. The response is positive and indicates that the amount of development proposed in the Core Strategy for the spatial area of the East Kennet Valley is acceptable and can be accommodated without any safety issues.
- 2.3 A policy on the AWE issue is included as policy CS9A in Appendix A. This sets out that a special policy approach is required in the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone. This will also need to be shown on the Proposals Map. The policy also includes information on the appropriate monitoring of development, which will take place in partnership with Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council; Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council and that the policy will be kept under review.
- 2.4 Policy ADP4 on the East Kennet Valley has been revised to more fully reflect the significance of AWE. This includes the limitations on development in the service village of Aldermaston.

Justification of the Overall Housing Provision

- 2.5 The Inspector asked that the Council demonstrates in more detail if the housing figure of 10,500 set out for West Berkshire within the South East Plan is appropriate for the District in terms of balancing need and demand issues against environmental considerations such as the extent of the AONB in West Berkshire, and the amount of the District that is affected by flooding. Following Counsel's advice the need for this work was discussed by PTG in December 2010 and carrying out the additional work was supported by Members.
- 2.6 The changing policy agenda means that the Inspector is keen to ensure that the plan's evidence base remains up to date and that the Council is demonstrating flexibility which is one of the tests of soundness. The flexibility test set out in PPS12 sets out the need to be flexible enough to deal with changing circumstances over the long term.
- 2.7 The outcomes of this additional work are included within the supporting topic paper attached as Appendix B. This more fully explains the different elements that affect the housing number for the District, in order to give a fuller explanation and justification for the figure. Amendments have been made to the supporting text of CS1 to give more information about these different factors.
- 2.8 Following discussions at Planning Task Group on 21 January 2011, it has been agreed that the figure of 10,500 is justified. It is still a legal requirement that the

Core Strategy is in conformity with the South East Plan. Recent evidence, including the Government's overall ambitions for affordability and increasing the housing supply, does not merit a move away from the housing figure at the current time. It is considered that the Core Strategy demonstrates the flexibility to adapt to any changing policy requirement. The Sandleford Park strategic site could deliver more than 1,000 dwellings before 2026 if necessary, and there is additional contingency shown through the updated Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

- 2.9 The housing figure of 10,500 will then be defended at the resumed Examination.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

- 2.10 The Inspector expressed concern about the clarity of the SHLAA which required further work to show which sites promoted through the SHLAA process could be developable, dependent on policy choices to be made through the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD. This included sites which are outside current settlement boundaries and which do not have policy constraints such as flooding.
- 2.11 Further work was also required to assess the landscape impact of SHLAA sites within the AONB (both individually and cumulatively), to assess whether the quantum of development proposed for the AONB through the spatial strategy of the Core Strategy was deliverable, taking into account the national importance of the AONB and the landscape sensitivity. This work has concluded and demonstrates that the amount of development proposed in the spatial strategy of the Core Strategy for the AONB is deliverable within the capacity of the landscape. Sites to fulfil the housing requirement will be allocated through the Site Allocations and Delivery Development Plan Document (DPD).
- 2.12 The outcomes of the work on the SHLAA also justify the spatial strategy for the other spatial areas, and demonstrate a 'basket' of potentially developable sites from which to select through the Site Allocations and Delivery DPD. Further references to the outcomes of the SHLAA have been added to the spatial policies of the Core Strategy.

AONB issues

- 2.13 The Inspector asked for further consideration to be given by the Council as to what meeting 'identified local needs' within the AONB means in practice. This stems from national guidance set out in PPS7. This work has been carried out, taking into account factors such as population projections, local needs surveys and the information from the housing waiting list. The details of this work are included within the supporting topic paper attached as Appendix B.

Clarity of the Presentation of Housing Distribution

- 2.14 The Inspector asked that the housing figures be presented in a consistent manner, building on the spatial approach set out in the Area Delivery Plan policies. This has led to one set of housing figures set out in the Area Delivery Plan Policies, setting out the scale of development for each of the Spatial Areas, and removing the figures from the different levels of the settlement hierarchy in policy SP1. The presentation has been simplified by transferring some of the policy content from Policy CS2 into CS1 and the deletion of Policy CS2.

- 2.15 The Inspector also felt that it was confusing to have Pangbourne in two overlapping spatial areas. As Pangbourne is factually in the North Wessex Downs AONB, references to it have been moved from the Eastern Area to the spatial policy on the North Wessex Downs AONB, and adjustments have been made to the housing numbers to reflect this move.
- 2.16 The Inspector also wanted an appropriate scale of development to be set out for the Rural Service Centres and Service Villages within the AONB, with the scale of development that might be appropriate for Hungerford contrasted, for example, with the scale of development for Lambourn and for Pangbourne. This has been progressed through adding more detail to the wording of the Area Delivery Plan policies to draw out local distinctiveness and the issues affecting the appropriate housing distribution for each Rural Service Centre and Service Village. This has also included reference to the opportunity sites at the Compton Institute of Animal health and Denison Barracks. There will also be further information provided through the evidence base about the availability of SHLAA sites in each area.

Business Development

- 2.17 In terms of B1 office floorspace in the District, the employment policy of the Core Strategy (CS10) has been amended to set a clearer steer as to sequentially suitable future locations for office development. This accords with PPS4 and states that office development should be accommodated in existing town centres first, followed by edge of centre locations before accessible out of centre locations. The revised policy CS10 forms part of the schedule of focused amendments. Supporting references in the topic paper demonstrate that the forecast shortfall in B1a office floorspace across the Core Strategy period can be accommodated in sequentially preferable locations.

Sustainable Design and Construction

- 2.18 Since the Examination closed, the Inspector has been in contact to ask the Council to take forward a 'Proposed Inspector Change' to policy CS16. This is the deletion of the sections of the policy under the headings *Residential Development* and *Non Residential Development* which set out requirements relating to the Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM. The reason for this is that the Inspector is not currently satisfied that these requirements are justified in relation to national policy in the Supplement to PPS1 (December 2007) particularly paragraphs 30-32. As this is a proposed Inspector change and **has not been supported by the Council**, it will be set out within a separate schedule to the focused amendments being proposed by the Council. This means that during the consultation, the Council can submit comments to the proposed change which will then be considered by the Inspector.
- 2.19 The wording of this proposed Inspector change is set out at the back of appendix A. As a consequence of this potential change, Policies CS3 and CS4 (Newbury Racecourse and Sandford Park) have been amended to include a site specific requirement on the Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM.

Other issues

2.20 A number of other issues are being amended and will form either focused or minor amendments to the Core Strategy.

- The critical cross boundary issues such as the relationship with Reading and the sub-regional economy are being brought out in more detail within the Core Strategy, with amendments to some of the background sections such as the cross boundary issues section and the SWOT analysis. This will be a focused amendment.
- Changes to policy CS3 (Newbury Racecourse) to clarify that any new proposals for the site would be subject to the requirements of policy CS7 (Affordable Housing).
- Changes to policy CS4 (Sandleford) which give further information about how the development is proposed to take place in terms of the proposed accesses and the location of the development to the north and west of the site. The concept plan for the site will be attached as an appendix to the Core Strategy.
- Changes to the wording (but not the principle) of several other policies including CS5 (Housing Type and Mix), CS6 (infrastructure), CS7 (affordable housing), CS9 (Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople), CS17 (Flooding) and policy CS20 (Historic Environment and Landscape Character). Some of these will be minor changes and will therefore not require consultation
- The Inspector also asked the Council provide further information on the equestrian policy (CS13) in terms of the sizes/facilities of training establishments in and abutting Lambourn and an explanation of how the council would assess the suitability of existing establishments. The further information has been provided to the Inspector, and wording for the policy has been drawn up and included within Appendix A.

3. Next Steps

3.1 The schedule attached as Appendix A was considered by Planning Task Group on 21 January 2011 and by Management Board on 27 January 2011.

3.2 A 6-week period of public consultation will then follow between 4 February and 18 March 2011. Following analysis of the responses to the consultation and sending this information off to the Inspector, the Inspector will resume the examination in summer 2011.

Appendices

Appendix A Schedule of Post Examination Focused Changes to the Core Strategy.

Appendix B Proposed Focused Changes – Supporting Topic Paper.

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: n/a

Officers Consulted: Corporate Board.

Trade Union: n/a