

Agenda Item 9

Report to: Planning Committee

Date of Meeting: 21 September 2011

Subject: Core Strategy for Sefton: initial report following consultation on the Options Stage

Report of: Director Built Environment

Wards Affected: All

Is this a Key Decision? No

Is it included in the Forward Plan?
No

Exempt/Confidential

No

Purpose/Summary

To provide Members with an initial summary of consultation received to the Options stage of the Core Strategy and to indicate a broad timetable for the next steps.

Recommendation

That Members note the initial results of consultation following the Options Stage of the Core Strategy and the proposed next steps.

How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

	<u>Corporate Objective</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		✓	
2	Jobs and Prosperity		✓	
3	Environmental Sustainability		✓	
4	Health and Well-Being		✓	
5	Children and Young People		✓	
6	Creating Safe Communities		✓	
7	Creating Inclusive Communities		✓	
8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local Democracy		✓	

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Reasons for the Recommendation:

To keep Members up to date with initial results of consultation and the next steps.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

None

(B) Capital Costs

None

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Legal None		
Human Resources None		
Equality		
1.	No Equality Implication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.	Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="checkbox"/>

Impact on Service Delivery:

None

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Head of Corporate Finance (FD 969) has no comments on this report as there are no direct financial implications as a result of it. The Head of Corporate Legal Services (LD 330/11) has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated into the report.

Are there any other options available for consideration?

No.

Implementation Date for the Decision

N/A

Contact Officer: Steve Matthews

Tel: 0151 934 3559

Email: steve.matthews@sefton.gov.uk

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Background

- 1.1 The 12 week consultation on the Options Stage for the Core Strategy for Sefton came to a close on 12th August 2011. During this time the Core Strategy team attended 65 events (meetings, presentations and drop in events) and spoke to about 3000 people ranging from the business community to local residents groups, children in care and elderly people. The team also worked with the young advisors who presented lessons to a class in four secondary schools across Sefton.
- 1.2 Following criticism early in the consultation period that many people did not know about the consultation, members will recall that they considered a report on 29th June 2011 asking them to endorse a number of changes to the approach to consultation. This included writing to people who lived on or close to sites where development may take place, depending on which option is ultimately chosen as the Core Strategy “Preferred Option”. Further drop-in events and meetings were added to the schedule.
- 1.3 Planning Committee also agreed that focus groups be held in each Area Committee area in order to receive representative views from a cross-section of people, drawn from the Citizens’ Panel.

2. Assessment of programme of consultation

- 2.1 The approach to consultation which Local Planning Authorities [LPA] should carry out in preparing Core Strategy documents is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2009. Regulation 25 states that a Local Planning Authority must invite ‘specific’ and ‘general’ consultation bodies who may have an interest in their area to make representations about what the Core Strategy ought to contain. It continues that the LPA must also consider whether it is appropriate to invite presentations from persons who are resident or carry on business in its area. The LPA must make arrangements for inviting representations from residents and businesses as it thinks appropriate.
- 2.2 Although no time period is specified for when representations may be submitted, paragraph 28, which relates to publicity relating to the final draft plan (the “pre-submission” Core Strategy), must be for a minimum of 6 weeks starting on the date the notice is first published. The purpose of the consultation process is to ensure that a representative proportion of Sefton’s communities can comment upon the options put forward for the Core Strategy.

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- 2.3 At the start of the consultation adverts were placed in the following local papers: the Southport Visitor, Formby Times, Maghull & Aintree Star, Crosby Herald and Bootle Times. The advertisements included the times and dates of the drop in events. These papers also ran their own stories about the proposed Options throughout the consultation period. Adverts were also placed in the Liverpool Daily Post and Metro. Posters were displayed in Council buildings, one stop shops, libraries, leisure centres, schools and youth centres, and local facilities e.g. shops and doctors surgeries. In addition many local groups, councillors and at least one MP distributed leaflets in their areas telling people about the consultation.
- 2.4 Despite the extra consultation carried out following early criticism, complaints continued to be received about the adequacy of the consultation. These will be analysed as part of the assessment of the Options consultation (see section 3 below) and in deciding on what approach is taken to consulting on the Preferred Option next year.

3. Process of recording and acknowledging representations

- 3.1 About 2,500 representations have been received following this consultation. The process of logging these onto a database has begun. This will enable comments to be analysed according to area and topic. It is intended to being a detailed report to Committee in the November cycle. In the meantime people's comments will be individually acknowledged, either by email or by letter. No detailed analysis of the comments has yet been undertaken as the individual responses are still being logged.
- 3.2 Most comments refer to individual sites rather than to the overall scope of the Options Paper. Those comments cover a wide spectrum of issues. Some have queried the need for the new homes and jobs in Sefton and some of the evidence supporting the Options Paper. Some have opposed the loss of Green Belt and greenspace and do not want to see open areas built on. Others have raised issues about the suitability of the sites for development, including the following:
- ◇ traffic congestion
 - ◇ lack of infrastructure e.g. drainage, health facilities, school places;
 - ◇ alternative sites available (e.g. brownfield sites; empty homes)
 - ◇ loss of high quality agricultural land
 - ◇ flooding problems
 - ◇ natural value of site/ value of site for recreation
 - ◇ attractiveness of site
 - ◇ devaluation of property/ loss of view.
- 3.3 A full 'Report of Consultation' will be prepared for members later this year. This will comprise a detailed summary of all the points received and officers' initial responses. Each person who submitted comments will be contacted to be made aware of this report and how to obtain a copy.

4. How will representations be assessed?

4.1 Three key aspects must be held in balance:

- ◇ the number of comments received, and the strength of feeling behind these comments, is one very important aspect
- ◇ attention must be given to the evidence which has been gathered e.g. in relation to the need for new homes and jobs. This will need to be updated as the Core Strategy goes through its various stages.
- ◇ the Core Strategy plan must comply with Government policy: It will be examined against 'tests of soundness'. If the Core Strategy does not meet these, the Council is in danger of not having an approved framework for making decisions.

4.2 With regard to the last point, the Government's proposed new planning policy in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework is an important consideration. Members will have the chance to respond to this draft document elsewhere on the agenda.

4.3 These issues will be considered in more depth when a full report is brought later in the year.

5. What next?

5.1 A Report of Consultation will be prepared. This will be brought back to Members later in the year, and will also be considered by the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel.

5.2 Detailed work will be carried out to respond to the comments people have made both about individual sites and in relation to the wider evidence supporting the Core Strategy. In particular, a study will be commissioned to assess the implications of possible development on high quality agricultural land.

5.3 A Member/Officer steering group will be established to guide the next steps of the process, and in particular to agree the Council's approach to preparing the Preferred Option stage.

5.4 The Preferred Option will be the subject of a further 12 week consultation sometime in 2012. The Draft Core Strategy timetable sent to all members in early September contains some more detail about the various stages and respective draft timelines involved. Officers will continue to monitor progress against this timeline and provide further updates as appropriate.