

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 19 July 2012

Subject: Wigan Core Strategy: Options for addressing the shortfall of housing land, and other proposals, for public consultation

Report of: Corporate Director - Places Directorate

Contact officer: Nick Clarke, 01942 489222

Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Councillor D T Molyneux

Purpose / summary: To advise Cabinet that the independent inspector appointed to undertake the public examination of the Wigan Core Strategy has identified a shortfall of housing land in the borough to the period to 2026. As a result he has agreed to suspend the examination to allow the council to do further work to identify how the shortfall of housing land identified can be met. Specifically he requires the council to appraise and, if appropriate, consult on options for meeting this shortfall. Cabinet approval is sought to consult on the options identified and appraised.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: The alternative option is to withdraw the Core Strategy from the public examination process and prepare a different Core Strategy or a new Local Plan for the borough. The ongoing absence of an up-to-date development plan would be likely to result in a number of planning applications being received for safeguarded land in outer areas of the borough, and delay the introduction of the community infrastructure levy, consequently putting at risk the planned regeneration of inner areas of the borough, including the delivery of key infrastructure needed.

Recommendation / decision: That Cabinet approves that consultation on the options for addressing the shortfall in housing land in the borough and the other proposed

changes to the housing supply, should take place in line with this report, for public consultation from Tuesday 31 July to Tuesday 11 September 2012, after which it will receive a further report on the results of the consultation and the proposed response, seeking endorsement to Council for submission thereafter to the independent inspector.

Key Decision:

This report involves a key decision within ground(s) 2.

The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed, i.e. before 31 July 2012

This item is included in the Forward Plan.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	Within planned resources
Staffing:	Within planned resources
Policy:	In accordance with national planning policy. Will be the lead document in Wigan's Local Plan.
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	Yes – it was submitted to the Secretary of State as a supporting document alongside the Draft Core Strategy.
Wards affected:	All

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

No

Has the Head of Service, Legal and Risk (Monitoring Officer) (John Mitchell) confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution?	Yes
Has the Director Corporate Services (Paul McKeveitt) confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget?	Yes
Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?	No

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only:

Categorisation of the report:	X		X
Key Decision	X	Corporate Issues	

Non-key Decision	

Performance Monitoring	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Committee	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
		19/7/12	

There are no Background Papers to this Report within the meaning of Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Proper Officer G. Bishop

Date 2 July 2012

1. Background:

- 1.1 The Core Strategy is the spatial development plan for the borough to 2026. Cabinet on 7 July 2011 and then Council on 20 July approved the submission of the Draft Core Strategy to the Secretary of State for independent examination. It was duly submitted in September 2011 and a planning inspector, Kevin Ward, was appointed. Hearing sessions were held in January and February of this year and an additional session was held in April. The Core Strategy as submitted focuses the bulk of new development in the East-West core of the borough with a more limited amount of new housing proposed in the outer areas most notably along the East Lancs Road corridor.
- 1.2 The Inspector considers that insufficient land has been identified to meet housing needs to 2026. The shortfall of land that he has identified is for 2,500 homes against a total requirement of land for 16,500 homes. He has taken account of issues such as the saturation of the housing market in certain locations, deliverability and choice. As a result he has:
- reduced by 1,000 homes, the expected delivery totals of the proposed sites and locations in the Hindley / Leigh / Atherton areas through to 2026 as he does not believe the delivery of housing on those sites will be as high as the Council or the landowners believe.
 - added 5% (750 homes) for flexibility, to allow for non-delivery throughout the wider range of sites identified in our Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.
 - made an allowance for the loss of existing residential properties which, at 50 per year, also amounts to 750 homes by 2026 (15 x 50).
 - reduced the allowance for new homes expected to be completed on windfall sites between 2011 and 2026 from the 1500 homes put forward by the Council at the examination to 500 homes (windfall sites are those which cannot be specifically identified now but will come forward as housing sites before 2026)
- 1.3 As a result the Inspector has written to the council to formally suspend the examination. This is a pause in the examination to do more work and is not uncommon. It is to enable the council to do further work to identify how the shortfall can be met. If the council is content that it can identify how the shortfall can be met in line with the Draft Core Strategy as submitted, the examination will resume towards the end of the year.
- 1.4 The Inspector wants the council to examine all of the options for meeting the shortfall and, if we wish to proceed, consult widely on these options before we determine our proposals and present them back to him. The council also needs to reconult on proposals for the East Lancs Road area and consult specifically on a site at Atherton, as following the hearing sessions there are changes proposed to their development assumptions.
- 1.7 In order to progress this work we have:
- Produced and consulted with housbuilders and landowners, a draft update of our strategic housing land availability assessment.
 - Identified options for meeting the shortfall, including in the Green Belt as sought by the Inspector.
 - Undertaken a technical assessment, initial transport assessment, sustainability appraisal and habitat regulations assessment of these options and the other locations.
 - Prepared a public consultation document.

- 1.8 We now need to consult the public and other stakeholders on these options and the other proposals.
- 1.9. All other Core Strategy matters are on-hold until the issue of the shortfall of housing land has been determined.

2. Proposals:

2.1 In line with the approach which the Inspector wishes us to take, an assessment has been undertaken to examine where additional housing land could be identified to meet the shortfall he has identified. These options are in addition to the work we are doing on assessing the capacity of existing known and expected sites. They involve looking at either land that has been held in reserve for potential future development (called safeguarded land) or Green Belt.

2.2 In the existing development plan for the borough (the UDP), adopted in 2006, areas of safeguarded land have been identified around some settlements in the borough. These are effectively areas of land held in reserve until needed in the future through a review of that plan. They are called safeguarded as they are safeguarded for future development. Their purpose is to enable expansion of settlements to take place in the future if required, without needing to make changes to the boundary of the Green Belt at each plan review. Given the views of the Inspector, it is now necessary to consider whether it is appropriate to now identify any of these areas for development up to 2026. These strategic options are to identify:

- Land safeguarded for future development at Standish
- Land safeguarded for future development at Golborne and Lowton

2.3 In addition, the Inspector requires the Council to consult on options for taking land out of the Green Belt for housing. Therefore the options will also be to consult on the possibility of housing on:

- Land in the Green Belt around Wigan
- Land in the Green Belt around Leigh

- Combinations of the above options.

2.4 Maps showing all of these options are set out in the Appendix to this report.

Option A: Standish

2.5 At Standish there are two areas of land safeguarded for future development, one to the west of the town between Standish and Shevington Moor, known as 'Almond Brook', and one to the east of the town to the north and south of Rectory Lane. Almond Brook is over 48 hectares but due to constraints has a developable area of 35 hectares and an estimated capacity of 1000 homes. The north side of Rectory Lane is 18 hectares with a capacity of around 540 homes whilst the south side is 49 hectares with a capacity of around 1500 homes. More detail including maps included as an appendix to this report.

2.6 Together therefore, there is capacity on safeguarded land at Standish for over 3,000 new homes, of which it could be expected that 2,640 homes could be built by 2026. This would meet the shortfall of land for new housing identified by the Inspector. However, significant levels of development in Standish would not accord with the Core Strategy as submitted to the Secretary of State. If it was concluded that Standish as a whole or in part is the best option for meeting the shortfall of housing land, we would not be able to adopt the Core Strategy. This is because in the submitted Core

Strategy, Standish is not proposed to expand and if the Council now wished to pursue this, it would have to withdraw the Core Strategy and start a new plan.

Option B: Golborne and Lowton

- 2.7 At Golborne and Lowton there are three areas of land safeguarded for future development: at Rothwell's Farm, Lowton Road, Golborne; East of Stone Cross Lane, Lowton; and Pocket Nook Lane, Lowton. These broad site options have previously been consulted upon as part of the proposed broad location for new development at the East Lancashire Road corridor. However, rather than being broad site options, it is now clear that all three sites would need to be designated for development if the Core Strategy is to be adopted.
- 2.8 Rothwell's Farm, Lowton Road, Golborne is over 17 hectares and has a capacity for around 430 homes. East of Stone Cross Lane (also known as Stirups Farm) is 26 hectares and has a capacity of around 650 homes. Pocket Nook Lane is over 67 hectares but due to constraints has a capacity of around 1560 homes. It is unlikely that all 1560 would be built by 2026.
- 2.9 Together therefore, there is capacity on safeguarded land at Golborne and Lowton for over 2,640 new homes, of which it could be expected that 2,200 homes could be built by 2026. This would help meet the shortfall of land for new housing identified by the Inspector alongside additional capacity identified in the 2012 update of our Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. It would be a main change to the Core Strategy as submitted to the Secretary of State, but not to the extent that it would be inappropriate at this stage. Therefore, if it was concluded that Golborne and Lowton is the best option for meeting the shortfall of housing land, we would be able to adopt the Core Strategy subject to any other changes required.

Option C: Green Belt land around Wigan

- 2.10 The Inspector requires the Council to assess the potential of releasing Green Belt land for housing. An initial assessment of Green Belt land identified 17 broad site options. These were considered against the objectives for Green Belt set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and were reduced to the seven best options on those grounds for further consideration. Five of these broad site options are around Wigan: West of Standish Lower Ground (23 hectares/430 homes); North of Beech Hill (71 hectares/1948 homes); North-west of New Springs (42 hectares/1200 homes); South-east of Hawkley (51 hectares/1500 homes); and South of Winstanley (83 hectares/2300 homes).
- 2.11 Although not all of these areas could be built out by 2026, together there is capacity on Green Belt land around Wigan that could be built by 2026 that would meet the shortfall of land for new housing identified by the Inspector. Clearly, however, there is a strong policy presumption against new development in the Green Belt and, in any case, it would not accord with the Core Strategy as submitted to the Secretary of State. If it was concluded that land in the Green Belt around Wigan is the best option, or is part of the best option for meeting the shortfall of housing land, we would not be able to adopt the Core Strategy.

Option D: Green Belt land around Leigh

- 2.12 As noted above, an initial assessment of Green Belt land identified 17 broad site options. These were considered initially against the objectives for Green Belt set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and were reduced to the seven best

options on those grounds for further consideration. Two of these broad site options are at Leigh: North-east of Bedford (44 hectares/600 homes) and East of Hooten Gardens (21 hectares/550 homes).

- 2.13 There is therefore insufficient capacity on Green Belt land around Leigh to meet the shortfall of land for new housing identified by the Inspector. It would need to be brought forward alongside part of another option. However, as at Wigan above, there is a strong policy presumption against new development in the Green Belt and, in any case, it would not accord with the Core Strategy as submitted to the Secretary of State. If it was concluded that land in the Green Belt around Leigh is part of the best option for meeting the shortfall of housing land, we would not be able to adopt the Core Strategy.

Option E: Combinations of the other options

- 2.14 Any combination of the above options could also be considered. One option would be to include one of the broad site options at each of Standish, Golborne and Lowton, the Wigan Green Belt and the Leigh Green Belt. Alternatively an option could combine parts of both the Standish and Golborne and Lowton options. However, any combination of options would not accord with the Core Strategy as submitted to the Secretary of State as Standish was not proposed in it for significant development nor would it accord with the policy of focussing most development within the East West core of the borough. If it was concluded that a combination of the above options was the best option for meeting the shortfall of housing land, we would therefore not be able to adopt the Core Strategy meaning that it would have to be withdrawn and a new plan started.

Other proposed locations for housing development

- 2.15 Three other matters relating to the supply of housing land have emerged through the course of the examination to date and it is appropriate to consult on them at this time. These are:
- The inclusion of safeguarded land at Coldahurst Lane, Larkhill, Astley in the east-west core of the borough
 - Clarifying the position on housing development as part of the broad location for new development at East of Wigan Road, Landgate, Ashton-in-Makerfield
 - The identification of safeguarded land within the east-west core at South of Atherton as a broad location for new development.

Coldahurst Lane, Larkhill, Astley

- 2.16 Coldahurst Lane, Larkhill, Astley is safeguarded for future development. It is identified in the submitted Core Strategy as a broad site options within the East Lancashire Road corridor. As a result of the examination process to date it is proposed to extend the east-west core to include the whole of Tyldesley and Astley, including land at Coldahurst Lane, Larkhill, Astley. The affect of this is to make it highly likely that it will be brought forward for housing development within the timeframe of the Core Strategy, as opposed to it being possible. The council's officers accepted this position informally at the examination following the debate.
- 2.17 The land is around 13 hectares. It is 2 kilometres south of Tyldesley town centre and is bounded by housing estates off the A572 Manchester Road to the west and north, a housing estate off Higher Green Lane to the west and the A580 East Lancashire Road. It includes areas at risk of flooding. Therefore, the developable area is only

around 7.5 hectares, with capacity for around 230 homes. It could be expected that all of these homes could be built by 2026.

Landgate, Ashton

- 2.18 Ashton-in-Makerfield is already in the east-west core of the borough and land east of Wigan Road, Landgate, Ashton-in-Makerfield is already identified as a broad location for new development in the submitted Core Strategy. Policy SP4 as submitted states that it will be a location for employment development “with the possibility of some housing”. As a result of the examination process to date it is appropriate to clarify that around 300 houses are proposed on approximately one-quarter of the developable area, and that this would be towards the north of the area close to the existing community of Landgate.

Atherton

- 2.19 Atherton is also in the east-west core of the borough. At the time of submitting the Draft Core Strategy it was not envisaged that the land safeguarded for future development to the south of the town would be needed through to 2026. However, as safeguarded land in the east-west core, it could be brought forward in a subsequent development plan document if needed. Through the examination process to date, however, it has become apparent that the land is needed. Therefore it would be appropriate to identify it as a Broad Location for New Development alongside comparable locations elsewhere in the east-west core. Unlike those other locations however, it has not been consulted upon to date so it now appropriate to consult upon it.
- 2.20 South of Atherton is nearly 60 hectares. It is 0.6 kilometres south of Atherton town centre and is bounded by housing areas off Hamilton Street together with Parklee Primary School and the former Hesketh Fletcher High School to the north, housing areas off the A577 Tyldesley Road in Hindsford to the east, the line of a former railway line, with open land in the Green Belt beyond to the south, and housing estates off the B5215 Leigh Road in Howe Bridge to the west. It includes areas at risk of flooding and school playing fields. The developable area is, therefore, around 47 hectares, with capacity for around 1,500 homes. However, the Inspector has concluded that it would compete with development at North Leigh Park and South of Hindley. Therefore, it could be expected that only around 600 of these homes could be built by 2026.
- 2.21 The shortfall of housing land identified by the Inspector would be greater if any of these three proposals were not made available for housing development through the Core Strategy.
- 2.22 All three locations have been assessed and the proposals for all three would be main changes to the Core Strategy as submitted to the Secretary of State, but not to the extent that it would be inappropriate at this stage. However, these locations would not contribute to meeting the shortfall identified. Instead, without them the shortfall would be greater.

Consultations

- 2.23 We are proposing to consult on these options and proposals from noon on Tuesday 31 July to noon on Tuesday 11 September. We will be writing, by mail or email to all parties on our consultation database. We will be writing to all neighbours of the broad site options. We will put site notices up at all of the broad sites. All of the detail will be available on the council’s website and the documentation will be in the borough’s

libraries. We will also hold 'drop-in' sessions with planning officers in Standish, Golborne and Lowton and Atherton.

- 2.24 We will fully consider all representations received and determine our proposals for recommendation to Cabinet on Thursday 25 October, seeking endorsement to Council on 7 November. We will then submit our proposals to the Inspector for consideration at a re-opened examination. Any hearing sessions arising are likely to be in January or February 2013. We would then anticipate receipt of the Inspector's Report in the Spring in time for the council to adopt the Core Strategy in July 2013.

3. Alternative options considered and reason for the recommended option:

- 3.1 The alternative option is to withdraw the Core Strategy from the public examination process and prepare a different Core Strategy or a new Local Plan for the borough. The ongoing absence of an up-to-date development plan would be likely to result in a number of planning applications being received for safeguarded land in outer areas of the borough, and delay the introduction of the community infrastructure levy, consequently putting at risk the planned regeneration of inner areas of the borough, including the delivery of key infrastructure needed.

4. Conclusions:

- 4.1 The Inspector has written to the council to formally suspend the examination of the Wigan Core Strategy. He considers that insufficient land has been identified to meet housing needs to 2026, specifically for 2,500 homes against a total requirement of land for 16,500 homes. He wants the council to examine all of the options for meeting the shortfall and, if we wish to proceed, consult widely on these options before we determine our proposals and present them back to him. If the council is content that it can identify how the shortfall can be met in line with the Draft Core Strategy, the examination will resume towards the end of the year.
- 4.2 The options set out in this report effectively include all of the remaining land safeguarded for future development in the borough that has not already been identified in the Core Strategy. In Wigan where there are no areas of safeguarded land, and in Leigh where there are only small areas of safeguarded land, options in the Green Belt have been identified from a longer list of Green Belt locations.
- 4.3 These options will not all be needed. Other than the Green Belt locations at Leigh, each option can individually meet the shortfall in housing land identified, taking into account the capacity identified in the 2012 update of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. However, as noted in the report, only one option – Golborne and Lowton - is sufficiently in line with the submitted Core Strategy to be included within it at this late stage. If any other option or combination of options is found to be the best option, we would have to withdraw the Core Strategy and either reconsult on a different Core Strategy or transfer the evidence base across to start work on a new Local Plan for the borough. Any such delay would be likely to bring forward planning applications for safeguarded land in outer areas of the borough and put at risk the planned regeneration of inner areas of the borough, including the delivery of key infrastructure.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the options and proposals will be highly contentious in those communities that would be most affected. Furthermore, given that the council will not be able to adopt the Core Strategy if the Standish or Green Belt options were determined to be the best options, it is not easy for the public to understand why we have to consult on them. However, the Inspector requires us to do so if we are to proceed in order to demonstrate clearly that the chosen option has been fully considered and is the best option available.

4.5 The approval of Cabinet is sought for the consultations on these options in line with the contents of this report. More detail on each option than is set out in this report will be available during the public consultation.