

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 9

meeting date: THURSDAY, 16 JUNE 2011
title: CORE STRATEGY – SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To confirm the approach to Sustainability Appraisal for the Core Strategy to comply with statutory requirements.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Council Ambitions – The matters dealt with in this report relate to the production of the Council's Local Development Framework, and the ambition of helping to protect and enhance the local environment.
- Community Objectives – The matters covered in this report will contribute to the objectives of creating a sustainable local economy and ensuring that there is a suitable supply of sites for employment and housing.
- Corporate Priorities – This paper supports the plan-making process and will assist the performance of the Council as a well-managed authority.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Work on the delivery of the Council's Core Strategy is reaching a key point in the process where alternative options for managing development have been published and tested through public consultation and we are now moving towards determining a preferred option for the Strategy. To comply with the statutory requirements of the plan-making process, the proposals have to be subject to formal sustainability appraisal to inform the process and ensure that in moving to the Council's preferred option the Council is able to draw on formal appraisal testing. To meet the legislative requirements this work now needs to be undertaken and will include the further alternatives currently being proposed.

2.2 Sustainability Appraisal is a formalised series of steps, of which the Council has already commenced work through the preparation of its Scoping Report, published in August 2010. This work also built on an earlier piece of work undertaken at the formative stage of the Core Strategy under a joint working arrangement with 5 local authorities (Hyndburn, Blackpool, Wyre, Fylde and Ribble Valley). Both pieces of work were undertaken by a specialist consultancy due to the nature and expertise required for the work and the extent of work involved.

2.3 The next stage of the appraisal process is to assess the alternative options proposed against a framework to determine sustainability strengths and weaknesses of each option. This process will then inform the Council's decision on the preferred spatial option for the Core Strategy and ensure that the Council can take forward, ideally, the most sustainable approach. Whilst the appraisal process is carried out within a framework it is still complex and relatively lengthy. It has to include elements of consultation and a "workshop" approach to key elements of the testing. Practice guidance also promotes an independent approach using external services in preference to those resources involved in drawing together the proposals. If the appraisal process is not in accord with the robust legislative requirements the Council will be unable to demonstrate to the Examination Inspector that the plan is sound. In order to meet the current programme for the Core Strategy and to establish a preferred option by the autumn, work needs to commence on the appraisal work.

3 CONSULTANCY

3.1 Both the early, joint approach and the more recent scoping report were undertaken by Hyder Consulting on behalf of the Council. However, given the nature of the work quotes have been sought from suitable firms to undertake the necessary work for the next stages. Fee proposals were invited based on the testing of the development option scenarios that formed the basis of the consultation last year at regulation 25 stage. Pricing ranged from just over £21,000 to just under £13,000 with prices received from all three firms namely Entec, WS Atkins and Hyder Consulting. Of the three firms Hyder provided the lowest cost. All firms provided a fee proposal based upon the same brief and provided slightly different options and approaches to the delivery of the brief. From the proposals received all would be capable of meeting the Council's requirements however Hyder provided the lowest price. Given the nature of their experience of working in the area and established background data they can also offer benefits of continuity.

3.2 The cost of the work would be contained within existing budgets currently derived from Planning Delivery Grant and money set aside in reserves for the LDF. Given the importance of the work to the delivery of the Core Strategy and that the document has a relationship with securing the economic growth and regeneration, it is also proposed to via some money between budgets to support the delivery of the Core Strategy. As Members are aware, additional option scenarios are to be published and there is therefore an additional element of testing that will be required. Consequently a further contingency should be allowed to accommodate this additional work within the budget.

3.3 It is therefore proposed that a budget provision of £15,000 be identified for the sustainability work and that Hyder Consulting be instructed to progress the appraisal subject to confirmation of requirements and costs.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The cost of the work will be contained within existing budgets, however Members need to be aware that future budget provision will be required to meet the costs of the Public Examination which are currently included in the Planning Delivery Grant allocations. Members have had information previously about the need to

secure additional funding to meet the full costs of the LDF. The additional costs for the Examination and further LDF work will need to be considered in preparation of the 2012/2013 budget process.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Sustainability Appraisal is a statutory requirement of the LDF process.
- Political – Delivery of the Core Strategy is a priority for the Council.
- Reputation – The Sustainability Appraisal will inform the Council's decision-making and demonstrate how the Council can deliver sustainable development.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Agree to commission specialist consultancy support to undertake the Sustainability Appraisal for the Core Strategy and that Hyder Consulting be the selected provider.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1 PPS12 – Local Spatial Planning 2008.
- 2 Local Development Framework Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report August 2010.
- 3 SA Regulations – various.

For further information please ask for Colin Hirst, extension 4503.