

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

DECISION

meeting date: THURSDAY, 29 JULY 2021
title: STRATEGIC HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT LAND STUDY – CONSULTANCY SUPPORT
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS – DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING
principal author: COLIN HIRST – HEAD OF REGENERATION & HOUSING

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To agree the consultancy support to deliver key evidence for the Local Plan Review.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – To match the supply of houses in the borough with identified needs and to progress the Local Plan Review.
- Corporate Priorities – To be a well-managed Council, delivering efficient services.
- Other Considerations – To keep under review the resource implications of the Council's services.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will be aware that work is progressing to carry out the review of the Local Plan. At the meeting of this Committee held on 15 April 2021, Members received a report on the updated Local Development Scheme, which sets out the programme to develop the new Local Plan. Minute 1146 refers. A copy of the Local Development Scheme can be viewed using the following link:

<https://democracy.ribblevalley.gov.uk/documents/s1187/LDS%202021%20FINAL.pdf>

2.2 Work is currently underway to form the baseline evidence from which the issues and options consultation stage programmed for January 2022 will be based. Officers are currently drawing together a range of evidence documents to feed into that work. When the Local Plan budgets were agreed (Minute 482 refers) resources were allocated for consultancy services in some key areas of evidence. In addition, it was identified that some work areas would be delivered by in-house resource. The Strategic Housing and Employment Land Study was one of the areas intended to be updated in-house. This will replace the existing SHLAA.

2.3 The Council's established evidence base has the existing Strategic Housing Land Availability report with which Members may be familiar and was originally adopted in 2008. This was subsequently updated and refreshed in 2013 ahead of the examination for the Core Strategy. The relevant documents may be viewed on the Council's website using the following link:

https://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/info/200364/planning_policy/1464/strategic_housing_land_availability_assessment

3 THE SHELA

3.1 The SHELA, as was the SHLAA is a key piece of evidence that helps identify potential sources of land to enable the Council to ensure it has land available to deliver its strategy and housing requirements. Most importantly it does not allocate land or grant

permission in itself. Sites still need to follow the due process of either Local Plan allocation and/or the grant of planning permission through due process.

- 3.2 The most recent guidance in relation to strategic land studies has amended the focus to include consideration of employment sites as part of the study, hence the term SHELA, Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability. Government guidance also sets out the process to be followed and the basis on which a SHELA would be accepted as valid. The process is shown on the flowchart attached at Appendix 1 and would provide the model by which to provide a sound study.
- 3.3 The Council is required to publish an up-to-date study as part of the plan-making process and to meet national policy requirements. Given that the last update was in 2013, it is important to make progress on putting in place a new study. A key part of the study process is to run what is termed a call for sites whereby the Council issues an invitation for sites to be put forward for consideration. This not only ensure that potential and suitable sites are identified, it also informs the preparation of the option stage by providing the opportunity for the Council to have considered reasonable alternatives as a requirement of the plan-making process.
- 3.4 Clearly this can be sensitive, however if the Council cannot demonstrate that it has considered reasonable alternatives in relation to the Development Strategy patterns of development and potential sites, there is a strong likelihood that the process will not be proved sound at Examination and the plan would be rejected.

4 THE NEED FOR CONSULTANCY

- 4.1 Members will recall when the Local Development Scheme was considered, reference was made to a number of resource issues, in particular those relating to ongoing staffing matters and that this would have to be kept under review and the implications brought back to Members.
- 4.2 At present one senior post within the team remains subject to long-term absence. Members will also recall that the option to recruit a temporary member of staff to help to assist and provide cover, was proposed. Successive adverts have not attracted any candidates. Similarly, as reported in April, the temporary secondment of a member of the Development Management team to support the programme has not taken place as the proposed staff member chose not to take up the secondment. Given the need to progress the plan it is considered that the most appropriate approach at this point would be to secure consultancy support to undertake the delivery of the SHELA, working as appropriate with Council Officers. With the principal work producing the SHELA outsourced, this will provide capacity for the current team to move forward on other areas of work and therefore seek to maintain the published timetable.
- 4.3 The proposal therefore is to secure consultancy support to deliver the SHELA. Elements of the work will co-ordinate with other evidence commissions in relation to employment land but by outsourcing the work at this stage, it will enable the Council to have in place the necessary key evidence to meet targets.
- 4.4 The current Local Plan budget has resources available so at this stage there is no requirement to identify additional funding. Some elements of proposed consultancy expenditure may need to be deferred pending future budget reviews, in particular in the light of the issues that arise following the issues and options consultation stage, which at this stage cannot be prejudged. The Local Plan budget was considered by this Committee at the meeting held on 6 January 2019. Minute 482 refers.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

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

- Resources – Staffing resources in relation to producing the Local Plan remain a concern in the light of current circumstances, the inability to recruit temporary cover and that the secondment is not now taking place. The use of consultancy is viewed as the most appropriate way forward to protect the Council's interests and progress the plan. Budget provision for the Local Plan has been established, however directing resources to this piece of work is likely to have implications for the future stages of the Local Plan process. This will need to be considered in the first instance at the mid-year budget review process and subsequently as part of ongoing monitoring of the Local Plan process, including the issues that emerge and the budget implications for years 2 and 3 of the programme.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council is required to keep planning policies up to date and it is envisaged by Government that Local Planning Authorities will have in place by December 2023 an up to date and adopted Local Plan. The Council must make progress on the Local Plan in order to meet this Government target. The SHELA is a key evidence requirement to ensure the Council can demonstrate a sound plan.
- Political – There is significant interest in the plan-making process and development issues in the borough and the Council needs to ensure it takes steps to have up to date and robust evidence in place.
- Reputation – The matters in this report would demonstrate that the Council is a well-run authority.
- Equality & Diversity – The Local Plan process includes measure to protect equality and diversity considerations.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

6.1 Agree to secure consultancy support to deliver the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Study and that the appointment of a suitable consultancy is commissioned as soon as possible, having regard to the Council's financial and procurement regulations.

6.2 Endorse the publication of a call for sites to inform the Local Plan process and that the call for sites process is kept under review by the Development Plan Working Group.



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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Development Scheme.

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

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