

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 18 March 2010

Subject: St Helens Local Development Framework - Amendments to Core Strategy Publication Draft

Report of: Interim Executive Director of Environmental Services

Contact officer: Nick Clarke 01942 404235

Purpose / summary: St Helens Council is at an advanced stage in preparing its Core Strategy as part of its Local Development Framework. It is consulting until 24 March 2010 on amendments made to the Core Strategy Publication Report. This is the final consultation before the Council submits the strategy for examination-in-public. The key issue for this borough is the proposed planning policy for a strategic rail freight interchange at Parkside, to the east of Newton-le-Willows, and whether to retain or withdraw the objections that we have submitted previously as a result of the changes made.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: The alternative options would be to not respond to the amendments made to the Core Strategy Publication Report; to maintain all of our objections to the policy approach; or to withdraw all of our objections on the basis of the changes made. This would mean that our position on the Core Strategy would either not be up-dated in response to the changes made, at what is the last opportunity to do so prior to its submission to the Secretary of State and its examination-in-public by an independent inspector; or would not seek to maintain the openness of the Green Belt between Golborne and Newton-le-Willows in a way that retains its integrity.

Recommendation / decision:

That Cabinet:

1. Maintains its outstanding objection to Policy CAS3.2 – Development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange in St Helens Core Strategy on the basis of the potential adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
2. Withdraws the other aspects of its objection to the policy and
3. Defers its position on the site boundary and any other relevant matters to consideration of the subsequent Allocations Development Plan Document, as well as maintaining its objections to the planning application that remains undetermined.

Key Decision:

This report does not involve a key decision. 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 30 March 2010.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	None.
Staffing:	None.
Policy:	The contents of the St Helens Core Strategy will have implications for Wigan Borough.
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	No.
Wards affected:	All.

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

No.

If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?

Not applicable.

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

The proposals that we are commenting on are those of Bolton Council. It is their responsibility to produce a diversity impact assessment.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? **Yes.**

Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? **N/A.**

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No.**

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:			
Discussion leading to a decision		Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	X
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Committee	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
		18 March 2010	

List of Background Papers in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Title of document	Which meeting did it go to?	Date of meeting?	Copy available from?
St Helens Core Strategy Preferred Options	Cabinet	13 November 2008	Civic Buildings New Market Street Wigan WN1 1RP http://localdevelopment.sthelens.gov.uk
St Helens Core Strategy Publication Report	Cabinet	2 July 2009	Civic Buildings New Market Street Wigan WN1 1RP http://localdevelopment.sthelens.gov.uk

Title of document	Which meeting did it go to?	Date of meeting?	Copy available from?
St Helens Core Strategy – Amendment to the Publication Report			Civic Buildings New Market Street Wigan WN1 1RP http://localdevelopment.sthelens.gov.uk
St Helens Core Strategy Background Paper – Parkside Rail Freight Interchange			Civic Buildings New Market Street Wigan WN1 1RP http://localdevelopment.sthelens.gov.uk

Proper Officer Gillian Bishop

Date 3 March 2010

1.0 Background:

- 1.1. Cabinet originally considered the St Helens Core Strategy at the Preferred Options stage and resolved to submit an objection to Policy CAS3.2 – Development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange at Parkside, Newton-le-Willows. This objection was largely concerned with the lack of recognition in the policy that ‘Parkside’ was immediately adjacent to Wigan Borough and its impacts, both positive and negative, would be felt within the borough. At around the same time the Planning Committee resolved to submit a number of objections to the planning application that is still before St Helens Council.
- 1.2. Cabinet most recently considered a report on the St Helens Local Development Framework Core Strategy Publication Draft in July 2009. A number of the wider impacts of Parkside had now been recognised. Our outstanding concerns were:
 - A lack of substantive recognition that the Parkside site has the potential to abut, or even extend into, Green Belt land within both Wigan and Warrington districts. The Core Strategy did not include an official boundary of the Parkside site. Instead, there was an indicative diagram indicating directions for growth, including growth towards the Wigan Borough boundary.
 - The traffic impacts of the development, particularly at the East Lancashire Road / Lane Head junction.
 - A lack of recognition that worklessness is also a key challenge for Wigan and Warrington, in addition to St Helens, despite the site being located adjacent to their borough boundaries.
 - The narrowing of the Green Belt between St Helens and the Wigan urban area.
- 1.3 St Helens Council received a substantial number of other representations on the proposed strategic rail freight interchange. As a result they undertook further work prior to the submission of the Core Strategy. This has now been completed and the policy has been refined in response to many of the points made. A background paper has also been produced.
- 1.4 St Helens Council is now consulting on these amendments until 24 March 2010. This is a further final consultation stage before the Council submits the Core Strategy to the Secretary of State for independent examination by a planning inspector.

2.0 Proposals:

- 2.1 The amended Publication Draft shows two scenarios for the proposed Strategic Rail Freight Interchange – a minimum scale scenario and a maximum scale scenario. The minimum scale scenario would see the development of the interchange to the west of the M6 motorway, with an operational area of around 85 hectares. The maximum scale scenario is for an expanded interchange, with the development of expansion land to the east of the M6 motorway, closer to Wigan Borough. It is considered that any expansion to the east would cover no more than 70 hectares of additional operational land. The development of this expansion land would only be permitted on completion of the land to the west of the motorway.
- 2.2 The precise boundaries of the site, including any expansion land, are deferred for determination in an Allocations Development Plan Document, which is scheduled for adoption in 2012. But the supporting diagram that accompanies the policy has been

changed. It did show the potential expansion as a series of arrows pointing outwards from the core of the site, including towards the Wigan Borough boundary. This is now replaced with a diagram that gives an indication as to where the expansion land might be (see Appendix 1).

- 2.3 The traffic impacts of the development are not considered in the background paper and the policy clause on traffic impacts remains the same as in the Preferred Options report.
- 2.4 The reasoning and explanation for the policy (paragraph 9.23C) notes that the significant employment opportunities likely to be created would help strengthen the local and wider sub-regional and regional economy, as well as tackling worklessness in St Helens. The background paper (paragraph 4.5.6) also notes that worklessness is also a challenge in Wigan and Warrington.
- 2.5 The background paper (Table 9.1) states that the narrowest part of the Green Belt between Golborne and Newton-le-Willows will remain unaffected at 1.4 kilometres.

3.0 Proposed Response:

- 3.1 It is entirely consistent with the advice that this council has been receiving to defer a decision on precise boundaries of strategic sites in Core Strategies to a subsequent development plan document. And St Helens Council is already working on an Allocations Development Plan Document. To the extent that the Core Strategy should be specific, the revised policy wording and diagram are now much clearer about the safeguards for the expansion land and that it is unlikely to abut the borough boundary. It is now appropriate to defer this matter to consideration of the Allocations Development Plan Document.
- 3.2 While we have serious concerns about the potential impact of traffic on junctions in Lane Head in particular, the policy clause on traffic impacts is appropriate for consideration of the detail presented in support of any planning application.
- 3.3 The recognition of the sub-regional and regional economic impacts of the development is entirely appropriate. The facility would not be in the heart of Merseyside, or even the heart of St Helens, but at the heart of an area covering Wigan, Warrington and St Helens districts.
- 3.4 The narrowest gap in the Green Belt between Newton-le-Willows and Golborne is between development at Rob Lane or Mere Road, Newton and Park Road, Golborne. The proposed development would not narrow this gap further. It would, however, narrow the gap to Lane Head, Golborne to around 1.7 kilometres and bring the Green Belt edge considerably closer (0.5 kilometres at its closest point) to Town of Lowton, which is within the Green Belt.
- 3.5 The principle of development for a strategic rail freight interchange in the Green Belt in the location of 'Newton-le-Willows' has already been established by the Regional Spatial Strategy. Furthermore, there are requirements in the policy that there are no unacceptable noise impacts on local residents; and that the impact on Green Belt and landscape character be mitigated by significant landscape and green infrastructure enhancement, including tree planting. As noted above, it is also the case that there are strict criteria for when and how the proposed expansion land can come forward. These

are appropriate safeguards for consideration of the detail presented in support of any planning application, or indeed the identification of the site boundary in the Allocations Development Plan Document.

- 3.6 Nevertheless, the scale of any such development proposed may be such that the impact on the openness of the Green Belt is considerable and cannot be adequately mitigated. It is appropriate to maintain our objection on this basis.

4.0 Alternative options considered and reason for the recommended option:

- 4.1 The alternative options would be to not respond to the amendments made to the Core Strategy Publication Report; to maintain all of our objections to the policy approach; or to withdraw all of our objections on the basis of the changes made. This would mean that our position on the Core Strategy would either not be up-dated in response to the changes made, at what is the last opportunity to do so prior to its submission to the Secretary of State and its examination-in-public by an independent inspector; or would not seek to maintain the openness of the Green Belt between Golborne and Newton-le-Willows in a way that retains its integrity.

5.0 Conclusions:

- 5.1 Our original objections to the St Helens Core Strategy at the Preferred Options stage were largely on the basis that the proximity of the location of 'Parkside' to Wigan Borough was almost ignored. As the Core Strategy has progressed this has been largely resolved. For the most part the policy sets an appropriate context for consideration of the site boundary and any other relevant matters in the subsequent Allocations Development Plan Document, and any planning application for the site. However, the Green Belt gap between Newton-le-Willows and Golborne (Lane Head) will be narrowed in a highly visible way that might not be capable of adequate mitigation. On this basis an objection to Policy CAS3.2 – Development of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange – should be made, while other matters are deferred for consideration in the subsequent Allocations Development Plan Document and our retained interest in the planning application that remains undetermined by St Helens Council.

Gillian Bishop
Interim Executive Director Environmental Services

Appendix 1:

