



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Cabinet 12 <sup>th</sup> June 2019	<u>Public</u>

## **SHROPSHIRE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW: CONSULTATION ON PREFERRED STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES**

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### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The principal purpose of this report is to seek approval for a consultation document which identifies preferred strategic sites in Shropshire. Several strategic sites have been promoted as part of the Local Plan Review process, including: the former Ironbridge Power Station, Buildwas; Clive Barracks at Tern Hill; RAF Cosford; and land north of Junction 3 of the M54.
- 1.2 These proposals provide strategic opportunities to deliver the objectives of Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy, including the delivery of investment within strategic corridors, to increase the productivity and output of the local economy. These proposals are in strategic locations in the county that have the potential to generate significant new investment in employment, thereby increasing the number but also the quality of jobs locally together with additional housing, improved infrastructure and local services.
- 1.3 The report also provides a summary analysis of the feedback which was received during the previous round of consultation on Preferred Sites between October 2018 and February 2019.
- 1.4 Finally, the report requests approval of an amended timetable for the Local Plan Review to reflect the scale and nature of the proposals which it now includes.

### **2. Recommendations**

- A. That Cabinet approves the draft document for consultation (attached) which identifies preferred strategic sites at the former Ironbridge Power Station, Clive Barracks at Tern Hill and RAF Cosford for consultation subject to minor amendments and editing. The document also seeks views on (but at this stage does not identify as a preferred allocation) outline proposals for a strategic employment site and related community services and housing north of Junction 3 of the M54;
- B. That authority is delegated to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning to confirm the final version of the documents and to publish these for public consultation;
- C. That Cabinet approves a revised Local Plan timetable as set out in the updated 'Local Development Scheme' attached to this report.

## REPORT

### 3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 The current Local Plan Review is designed to help ensure that the Local Plan will remain the starting point and platform for planning decisions during the period to 2036. The Council's preferred sites to deliver Shropshire's preferred housing and employment requirements were published for public consultation in November 2018. However, whilst it is considered that these requirements can mainly be met from sites within existing settlements, large mixed-use strategic sites including at the former Ironbridge Power Station, Clive Barracks at Tern Hill, RAF Cosford and north of Junction 3 on the M54 are also being promoted in the County. These sites are strategically located and offer the potential to generate significant new investment in employment, thereby increasing the number but also the quality of jobs locally.
- 3.2 The proposed consultation document proposes that there is sufficient evidence and justification for the former Ironbridge Power Station, Clive Barracks and RAF Cosford proposals to be preferred for allocation as 'strategic sites'. At this stage it is considered that further evidence and justification is required to enable the site at Junction 3 off the M54 to be preferred for development. However, despite this it continues to be considered appropriate for the Council to consult on all four options. If the Junction 3 proposal is proposed as a preferred option for development at the pre-submission draft stage of the plan preparation process, then this outcome will be subject to further consultation at that time.
- 3.3 The potential strategic sites also present a positive opportunity to generate greater resilience in housing delivery in the County through increased choice and competition. In the case of the former Ironbridge Power Station and Clive Barracks, Tern Hill, redevelopment would also demonstrate a proactive approach to bringing forward brownfield land to meet development needs.
- 3.4 Shropshire has the potential to benefit significantly from the delivery of these strategic sites by securing large scale investment in strategic and local infrastructure complementing the managed growth within existing towns and villages. However, the strategic scale of these proposals does inevitably raise issues about capacity of existing infrastructure and environmental assets which are also important challenges for their allocation through the Local Plan process, and this highlights the need for further, more detailed information and for local communities to have an opportunity to have their say on the proposals.
- 3.5 Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy (SEGS) identifies the need for a 'step change' in Shropshire's economy to: reduce levels of out commuting; retain employment and skills locally; increase productivity; and address housing affordability issues. The SEGS also identifies a number of strategic corridors and growth zones including the M54/A5 and A41 through Shropshire and identifies opportunities arising from the redevelopment of the former Ironbridge Power Station.
- 3.6 The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) has developed a Spatial Investment and Delivery Plan (SIDP) which identifies priority strategic growth

areas and corridors across the region. The primary purpose of the Plan is to enable the coordinated delivery of housing, employment and infrastructure. In particular, it seeks to deliver planned housing and employment growth so that they are mutually supportive. The latest version of the SIDP sets out a framework for growth that includes priority sites and growth corridors and associated infrastructure requirements and the actions that key stakeholders will take to support the delivery of new homes and employment opportunities in the region. The M54 Corridor is specifically identified in the SIDP as a strategic growth corridor.

- 3.7 The Local Plan Review consultation documents have been the subject of both a Sustainability Appraisal and a Habitats Regulation Assessment and copies of these assessments will be made available together with other relevant supporting evidence on the Council's planning policy web pages during the consultation period.
- 3.8 Land at Cosford and near junction 3 of the M54 lies within the West Midlands Green Belt. National policy requires Shropshire Council to present an 'exceptional circumstances' argument to justify the release of Green Belt land. There is a significant risk to the future allocation of these two sites if the Council are unable to adequately justify these 'exceptional circumstances' through the Local Plan examination process.
- 3.9 The potential impact of development on Green Belt land in Shropshire is identified as part of the published Green Belt Review which forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review. Any release of land near Junction 3 of the M54 would be predicated on meeting cross-boundary needs from the Black Country. The alternative options available to meet this need, including through Green Belt release within the Black Country and nearby authorities, are currently being investigated by the Black Country Authorities, who will publish their findings as part of the evidence base for the review of the Black Country Core Strategy. The findings of these studies will provide essential evidence to inform any decision about whether the release of land at Junction 3 from the Green Belt is justifiable.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Planned growth provides the best possible opportunity for Shropshire Council to harness growth potential by providing a stable platform for investors and developers. New growth simultaneously imposes an additional burden on local services and facilities, whilst also providing opportunities to secure investment to improve them. The provision of some of these services and facilities are the responsibility of Shropshire Council and other public service providers, and there is an opportunity for the Council to secure appropriate developer contributions from the developments in order to fund necessary infrastructure improvements.
- 4.2 The WMCA's SIDP (paragraph 3.6 above) will be a key influence on its investment decisions and delivery plans, including projects and plans to secure the public and private infrastructure provision which will be needed to deliver a quality of development essential for sustainable growth. In March 2018, WMCA secured a 'Housing Deal' with Government which provides significant funding for infrastructure, land remediation and acquisition to support its growth delivery plans.

## 5 Background

### *Feedback from consultation on preferred sites*

5.1 The Council's preferred sites to deliver Shropshire's housing and employment requirements were published for public consultation for 10 weeks between October 2018 and February 2019. Responses were received from around 3,600 unique respondents. An objective analysis of these responses was commissioned from consultants which has provided the following headline issues:

- Further evidence and justification will be required to demonstrate that windfall sites are a reliable source of housing supply, and that the Council's windfall housing guidelines are deliverable.
- The geographical extent within which different types of windfall development (open market / affordable) would be considered acceptable should be more closely defined.
- Further justification will be required to demonstrate the exceptional circumstances which justify the release of land from the Green Belt.
- Further definitions or supporting information explaining the meaning of various technical terms e.g. cross-subsidy exception sites, windfall development would be useful.
- The infrastructure capacity of settlements should be explored further, in particular primarily healthcare facilities, schools, bus services and impacts on the highway network.
- The provision of affordable housing is a key topic for respondents throughout Shropshire, the common themes raised which relate to affordable housing include:
  - More affordable housing should be delivered to retain local young people and first time buyers;
  - Need to secure more affordable housing from open market schemes;
  - The financial viability of a site/development proposal should be considered when setting affordable housing requirements

5.2 This analysis, which will include more detailed comments on specific settlements, will be made available on the Council's Planning Policy web pages during the consultation period.

## 6 Strategic Sites

6.1 Three preferred strategic sites have been identified as preferred options in the draft consultation document, these are:

### *Former Ironbridge Power Station*

6.2 The former Ironbridge power station occupies a 350 acre site south of the River Severn near Buildwas. The power station ceased operation in 2015. Harworth Group purchased the site from Uniper Plc in June 2018. Harworth is a regeneration company specialising in large sites with complex issues and have an excellent track record regenerating sites for new development like the former power station. Harworth have appointed specialist contractors to undertake the demolition of the former power station buildings including the cooling towers starting later this year. Harworth has been working closely with

local councils, the local community and other stakeholders to understand the site and the surrounding area. This engagement has helped Harworth to assemble a range of detailed evidence and draft an indicative masterplan for a mixed-use scheme which would provide employment land and around 1,000 homes, together with local services and facilities. The latest version of the masterplan is presented in the consultation document.

- 6.3 The redevelopment of the site presents an opportunity to create jobs, support the local tourism economy, provide housing and to deliver high quality remediation in a sensitive environmental context. The opportunity to capitalise on this significant strategic opportunity has been identified within Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy (2017-2021) and within the emerging partial review of the Local Plan.
- 6.4 Council officers have worked closely with Harworth and colleagues from Telford & Wrekin Council to help identify and address key infrastructure investment priorities and environmental issues relevant to the site and the wider area. An indication of the evidence base assembled to date, together with an assessment of key constraints and opportunities is presented in the consultation document.

#### *Clive Barracks, Tern Hill*

- 6.5 Clive Barracks is a 50 hectare military site on the A41 near Market Drayton which is currently home to the Royal Irish Regiment. MOD announced the intention to redevelop the site in March 2016, and have recently confirmed that they now plan to complete the vacation and disposal of the site by 2025. The site is located on the A41 strategic growth corridor. The site also has potential to benefit from improved connectivity from the new HS2 Rail link and Crewe Hub Station. The MOD and its consultants have been working closely with local councils, the local community and other stakeholders as part of a 'Task Force' led by Owen Patterson MP since 2016.
- 6.6 This engagement has helped MOD and its consultants to assemble a range of evidence and prepare an indicative masterplan for a mixed-use scheme which would provide employment land and around 750 homes as part of a new settlement, together with local services and facilities. Approximately 450 homes are expected to be delivered during the plan period to 2036. The latest version of the masterplan is presented in the consultation document, together with an assessment of key constraints and opportunities and a set of design principles.

#### *RAF Cosford*

- 6.7 The recent national defence review has confirmed RAF Cosford as a key MOD asset. However, MOD consider that its potential to meet future operational defence requirements is restricted by its Green Belt location. To reflect this, MOD have asked Shropshire Council to release land in their ownership at Cosford from the Green Belt to provide for an intensification of their use of the existing site.
- 6.8 The Cosford site is expected to act as a centre of excellence for both UK and International Defence Training and is intended to host the relocation of the School of Technical Training from MOD St Athan. Whilst detailed information

on any potential moves and associated users is currently restricted due to the sensitivity of this information, RAF Cosford's future role within the Defence College of Technical Training (DCTT) is expected to generate around an additional 1,500 staff and students using the existing site, although this number could potentially increase even further. These changes would also have associated requirements for new build development of training facilities including technical and domestic accommodation. In addition to the consideration of requirements arising from the DCTT, work is currently underway to capture and consolidate information on the feasibility of other potential moves to RAF Cosford. At present, it is too early to report back on any of the findings of this work, but it is anticipated that it will identify a number of potential non-DCTT users that are interested in utilising the site.

- 6.9 In addition to the MOD use of the site, the RAF Museum Cosford has outlined plans for a £40 million investment programme over 10 years to intensify and expand the museum site. Furthermore, the creation of a specialist aviation academy has recently been announced by the Aviation Skills Partnership in collaboration with Midlands Engine, the RAF, Air Cadets and Telford College. This is a major initiative to address demand for trained entrants to the Aviation Industry across all jobs, roles and skills in accordance with the Government's Green Paper Aviation 2050: The Future of UK Aviation. It also further elevates the importance of this location for UK aviation and potentially creates hundreds of new jobs at the site.
- 6.10 These proposals will require the development of new buildings on MOD owned land south of the railway line. Proposals for new development and intensification of the use of RAF Cosford are expected to be for military use or non-profit making uses rather than acting as a contribution to meeting Shropshire future growth needs.

## **7. Potential Further Strategic Site**

- 7.1 A further potential strategic site has been identified, although it is not at this stage identified as a preferred allocation since further information is required before any decision can be made about whether its development is justifiable.

### *M54 Junction 3*

- 7.2 The Bradford Estate has extensive land holdings north of Junction 3 on the M54 on both sides of the A41, which they promoted to the Council as part of the Local Plan Review. The Estates revised proposals are to provide for the construction of a strategic employment site of around 50 hectares, accompanied by around 3,000 homes, and a local centre to provide services, facilities and infrastructure as part of a planned settlement north of the M54 and west of the A41. The area of search identified by the site promoters is identified within the consultation document.
- 7.3 Recent evidence commissioned by Shropshire Council suggests that the M54/A5 corridor, much of which is located within the Green Belt, is a significant opportunity area and suggests there is considerable latent demand for serviced employment land to meet the needs of both occupiers for inward investment and local occupiers in the target sectors identified in the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy (SEGS). As part of this work, the consultant has

engaged with neighbouring local authorities and regional organisations including the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

- 7.4 It is envisaged that any strategic employment offer in the M54 corridor would be strongly related to the proposed intensification of technical training at RAF Cosford described above and would be complementary, rather than competing with, the employment offer within neighbouring areas. As such, the key objective for such a site would be to deliver supply chain opportunities and growth for companies in key sectors (including but not limited to engineering, advanced manufacturing, aviation, innovative healthcare and environmental technologies) as identified in the SEGS and in many ways complementary to proposals for RAF Cosford.
- 7.5 As a strategic location, the M54 corridor benefits from its proximity to existing international businesses dominant in growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing and engineering. The corridor also benefits from good access to transport infrastructure and will benefit from planned investments in road and rail in neighbouring areas. The corridor is close to higher education and training institutions including key assets such as RAF Cosford, Wolverhampton University and Harper Adams University.
- 7.6 It is not considered that the release of land north of Junction 3 of the M54 would be required to achieve the planned growth for Shropshire. However, national planning policy requires Shropshire Council to plan positively for growth by providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet local development needs and to consider any unmet need from neighbouring areas and whether it is practical to meet some or all of this need, where this is considered appropriate and consistent with the principles of achieving sustainable development.
- 7.7 The latest evidence indicates that the Black Country cannot accommodate its identified development needs within its urban area. The Black Country authorities estimate that there will be a shortfall of around 300ha of employment land, with a particular need for additional high quality, accessible sites capable of accommodating national investment requirements. Similarly, even by increasing densities and looking to other sources of urban land supply, the latest evidence also suggests that there will be a significant housing shortfall of at least 22,000 homes in the Black Country. The options available to the Black Country to meet this need, including through Green Belt release within the Black Country and nearby authorities are currently being investigated by the Black Country Authorities.
- 7.8 The characteristics of the M54 corridor highlighted above and its general proximity/accessibility to the Black Country, mean that, subject to the work being undertaken by the Black Country Authorities, there may be potential for Shropshire to agree to provide for some of this shortfall through the construction of a strategic employment site and housing as part of a new planned settlement at Junction 3 of the M54.
- 7.9 The site promoters are undertaking initial assessments of key constraints and opportunities in order to determine initial design principles and produce an initial masterplan.
- 7.10 Shropshire Council recognises that this proposal would represent a 'once in a generation' opportunity, and the development of a new planned settlement to

accommodate a mix of development would represent a significant positive growth opportunity for Shropshire. However, given the likely scale of the proposal it is considered there are a number of significant issues which need further consideration ahead of the Council being able to prefer this land for development, such as:

- i. The strategic scale of these proposals and mix of employment, residential and other uses;
- ii. Concerns about impacts on existing infrastructure, communities and environmental assets;
- iii. Justification for the release of Green Belt land – this is considered to be intrinsically linked with the assessment of the alternative options available to meet Black Country housing and employment needs;
- iv. Securing strategic infrastructure investment and cross boundary agreement with neighbouring authorities;

7.11 A range of further information is therefore required to inform any decision about this proposal and, in light of this, the proposed development north of Junction 3 is not currently being identified as a preferred strategic site. Instead, the draft consultation document seeks comments on:

- i. the potential benefits of the proposed development;
- ii. the issues and impacts which might be generated;
- iii. ways in which these might be mitigated or addressed.

7.12 Further information is therefore specifically required regarding:

- i. Assessment of alternative options available to the Black Country for meeting the housing and employment needs arising in the Black Country;
- ii. The outcome of the Black Country Green Belt review;
- iii. Infrastructure capacity assessment to identify key impacts and investment requirements, including the future needs and opportunities in relation to transport.
- iv. Infrastructure funding;
- v. The views of neighbouring authorities, Government agencies and major infrastructure providers;
- vi. Further evidence to support the economic development context.

## **8 Local Plan Timetable**

8.2 Shropshire Council is required by legislation and national policy to maintain an up to date Local Development Scheme (LDS), which is the 'Project Plan' that describes the current documents which make up the statutory Development Plan for Shropshire and the Local Plan documents that are to be prepared over the next 3-year period to replace existing policies. The current published version of the LDS was agreed by Cabinet on 2 May 2018. Due to the scale and nature of the proposals being considered within the ongoing Local Plan Review and the volume of feedback received during the last round of consultation on Preferred Sites, an updated timetable for undertaking the Local Plan Review has been prepared. This is documented within a revised LDS which covers the period from 2019 to 2022 and has been attached as an appendix to this report.



## 9 Next steps

- 9.1 Subject to Cabinet approval, the consultation document will be published for 10 weeks between July and September 2019. The consultation will be undertaken in line with the standards set out in the Council's published Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and national guidance. Consultation documents will be made available on the Shropshire Council web-site, and paper copies will be provided at libraries and council offices in the main towns. A significant number of organisations and individuals will continue to be notified directly of the publication of the consultation documents in accordance with the SCI. Electronic responses are encouraged to reduce printing and distribution costs and to reduce the time spent collating and analysing paper responses. Officers expect to continue to engage directly with parish councils in the areas concerned during the consultation period to help them to explore the implications of the proposed approach in their local context.
- 9.2 The consultation responses will be used to inform the next stages of the Local Plan review as described in the revised LDS, with formal consultation on a full 'Pre-Submission' version of the revised Local Plan now expected in Spring 2020, after which the Council expects to formally submit the Local Plan, together with any formal objections, for examination by the Planning Inspectorate in June 2020.

### List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

- Sustainability Appraisal (SA)
- Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)
- Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA)
- Local Plan Review Consultation Statement

These documents will be available from: <http://shropshire.gov.uk/planning-policy/local-plan/local-plan-partial-review-2016-2036/> during the consultation period.

- West Midlands Spatial Investment and Delivery (SIDP) Plan Revised Draft 21 February 2019  
<https://governance.wmca.org.uk/documents/s2639/2019.02.13%20HLDB%20Revised%20SIDP%20appendix%20to%20covering%20paper%20-%20Public%20paper%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

### Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Strategic Planning

### Local Members

Edward Bird, Kevin Turley, Claire Wild, Karen Calder, Rob Gittins, Paul Wynn

### Appendices

1. Consultation document on Preferred Strategic Sites;
2. Shropshire Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2019-2022