

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub-Committee

DATE: 2 April 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment

SUBJECT: Draft Runcorn Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) - Approval for Statutory Period of Public Consultation

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the publication of the draft Runcorn Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for the purposes of statutory public consultation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) The draft Runcorn Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document (Appendix A) be approved for the purposes of statutory public consultation for a six week period;**
- 2) The comments received at the stakeholder consultation stage, as set out in the Statement of Consultation (Appendix C) and responses to them are noted;**
- 3) Further editorial and technical amendments that do not materially affect the content of the Supplementary Planning Document be agreed by the Operational Director - Environmental & Regulatory Services in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration and Renewal, as necessary, before the document is published for public consultation; and**
- 4) The results of the public consultation exercise and consequent recommended modifications to the draft document be reported back to the Executive Board for resolution to adopt as a Supplementary Planning Document.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy

- 3.1 The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (2008) is an important element of the Mersey Gateway Project that builds upon the adopted vision that it is *'more than just a bridge'* but the *'catalyst'* for regeneration and investment throughout Halton, Cheshire, the Liverpool City Region and the North West.
- 3.2 The Regeneration Strategy is concerned with how the bridge can deliver a new context for place-shaping, set the agenda for a sustained economic, social, physical and environmental regeneration programme over the next 20 to 30 years and reconnect the communities of Runcorn and Widnes.
- 3.3 The Regeneration Strategy covers an area in excess of 20 square kilometres within the Borough of Halton, including the Runcorn SPD area. The area was agreed with the Council to provide a statutory planning basis for policy development due to its influence on the Local Development Framework.
- 3.4 Several key elements of this SPD have been informed by the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, building upon some of the principles, objectives and development opportunities set out within the document. A number of proposals described in this SPD are therefore based upon the preferred option as expressed in the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy agreed by the Councils Executive Board on 19th June 2008. This is especially relevant for the de-linking arrangements for the Silver Jubilee Bridge adjoining Runcorn Town Centre as described below and in more detail in the draft SPD.

Purpose of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD

- 3.5 This SPD updates and builds upon the Council's previous 1997 Runcorn Town Centre Strategy and the draft Runcorn Old Town SPD drafted in 2007.
- 3.6 In light of the opportunities presented by the Mersey Gateway Project and the identification of Runcorn Town Centre as an Action Area for regeneration and development in the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, the Runcorn Town Centre SPD has been revisited. This current draft has been prepared by GVA Grimley for the formal stages of public consultation.
- 3.7 The Mersey Gateway Project presents a series of distinct long-term opportunities to maximise the potential for the redevelopment of the Town Centre. These opportunities, as expressed in the Regeneration Strategy, are principally facilitated through the de-linking, or downgrading, of existing road transport infrastructure associated with the Silver Jubilee Bridge. This would result in some areas of land becoming available for development and enabling the existing road infrastructure into Runcorn Town Centre to be improved.

- 3.8 The purpose of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD is therefore to establish and identify potential development or improvement opportunities within the area that arise from the existing context and the proposals within the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy in order to help sustain the existing community and deliver regeneration benefits to the area.
- 3.9 The proposals set out in the Runcorn Town Centre SPD are specifically designed to:
- Enable Runcorn Town Centre to prosper without damaging the health of any other centres;
 - Safeguard and strengthen the centre's role as a safe and accessible place to shop, work and enjoy;
 - Co-ordinate public and private investment decisions;
 - Improve the economic prosperity of the Borough through the creation of new employment opportunities; and
 - Ensure the highest standards of design and architecture.

Sustainability Appraisal – Appendix B

- 3.4 Waterman Environmental were appointed by Halton Borough Council to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) for the Runcorn Town Centre SPD in order to meet the requirements of planning legislation and regulations. The main purpose of SA (the combined SEA and SA process) is to test whether implementation of the SPD is likely to have any significant environmental, social or economic effects.
- 3.5 The SA Framework developed for the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy incorporated Runcorn Town Centre as one of the key focal points for regeneration and development. It was therefore considered that the SA Framework developed for the Regeneration Strategy would be applicable to the SA of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD.
- 3.6 Key issues and SA objectives for the Runcorn Town Centre area that emerged from both the existing context and the proposals of the Mersey Gateway Project were consulted upon in December 2008/January 2009. The comments and responses can be found in Appendix D of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD SA.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 3.7 Required under the European Community Habitats Directive, a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) must be undertaken when a project or plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects).
- 3.8 A HRA Screening Report was produced in May 2008 as part of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy, which covers the Runcorn Town Centre SPD area. The HRA Screening Report is available upon request.

Statement of Consultation – Appendix C

- 3.7 The requirements of the planning system state that a record be kept of any consultees, their comments, and how they have been taken into account throughout the production of an SPD.
- 3.8 An informal draft of the Runcorn Town Centre SPD was circulated between 17th December 2008 and 12th January 2009 to key stakeholders to comment on the appropriateness of the document's content prior to the formal public consultation process. A list of those consulted, comments received and how these were taken into account is contained within the draft Statement of Consultation (Appendix C of this report).

Next Steps

- 3.9 The SA report, HRA and the draft Statement of Consultation will be made available during the six week formal period of public consultation, alongside the draft Runcorn Town Centre SPD.
- 3.10 Once the formal public consultation exercise has been conducted, the responses will be recorded and taken into account. It is intended that a further report will then be taken to Executive Board, seeking formal adoption of the revised Runcorn Town Centre SPD.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The SPD when adopted will be form part of the Local Development Framework for Halton. The development opportunities set out within this SPD are therefore complementary to relevant saved policies of the Halton UDP and other relevant Council SPDs.
- 4.2 Once adopted the content of this SPD will be a material consideration for the determining of any applicable planning application and so provide Halton Borough Council with greater detail and certainty to control and guide new development within the defined Runcorn Town Centre boundary.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No other implications

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

Children and Young People in Halton

- 6.1 The SPD will help to ensure that children and young people in Runcorn Town Centre grow up and thrive in safe environments and communities.

Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

- 6.2 Providing locally accessible employment opportunities is recognised in the SPD as a vital component of the redevelopment of Runcorn Town Centre.

A Healthy Halton

- 6.3 The SPD is intended to facilitate the development of a safe, attractive and healthy community that incorporates opportunities for recreation and healthy travel options.

A Safer Halton

- 6.4 The SPD seeks to ensure that Runcorn Town Centre contributes to a Safer Halton by creating and sustaining environments that are well designed, well maintained, safe and valued.

Halton's Urban Renewal

- 6.5 The redevelopment of Runcorn Town Centre is fundamental to Halton's urban renewal. The emerging policy content of the SPD will aid the transformation of Runcorn Town Centre's urban fabric, develop safe and attractive public spaces and create a dynamic and high quality centre that provides employment, commercial, retail and residential opportunities.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 No legal or financial risks to the Council can be identified so long as the statutory procedures for the preparation of SPDs are met.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 There are no identifiable equality and diversity implications contained in the SPD.

9.0 REASON (S) FOR DECISION

- 9.1 These are set out in Section 3, Supporting Information.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

10.1 This has been covered by the preparation process of the Halton Unitary Development Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

11.1 The SPD will be effective from the date of adoption by the Council's Executive Board.

12.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

| Document | Place of Inspection | Contact Officer |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Saved Policies of the Halton Unitary Development Plan (2005) | Rutland House | Andrew Pannell |
| Statement of Community Involvement (2006) | Rutland House | Neil Macfarlane |
| Draft Runcorn Town Centre Strategy SPD (2007) | Rutland House | Alasdair Cross |
| Local Development Scheme (2007) | Rutland House | Neil Macfarlane |
| Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (2008) | Rutland House | Andrew Pannell |
| Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy Habitats Regulations Assessment (2008) | Rutland House | Andrew Pannell |