

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee

DATE: 11th January 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment

SUBJECT: Approval of publication of Draft Town Centre Strategies for Halton Lea and Runcorn Old Town for Public Consultation

WARDS: Borough wide

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for the publication of the Draft Town Centre Strategies for Halton Lea and Runcorn Old Town as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) for the purposes of statutory public consultation.
- 1.2 Copies of the Halton Lea and Runcorn Town Centre Strategy SPDs can be found in **Appendix 1**.

2 RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the two draft Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs): Halton Lea Town Centre Strategy and Runcorn Old Town Centre Strategy be approved for the purposes of statutory public consultation;**
- (2) authority be delegated to the Operational Director - Environmental & Regulatory Services to determine all matters relating to the method, extent and content of the public consultation;**
- (3) the comments received at the partnership consultation stage are noted;**
- (4) further editorial and technical amendments that do not materially affect the content of the two SPDs be determined by the Operational Director - Environmental & Regulatory Services in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration and Renewal, if necessary, before the document is published for public consultation;**
- (5) authority be delegated to the Operational Director – Environmental and Regulatory Services to approve any further periods of statutory public consultation, on the Halton Lea and Runcorn Old Town SPDs should they be**

needed as a consequence of material changes being required to the document(s) as a result of comments received during the period of public consultation approved under recommendation 1; and

(6) the results of the public consultation exercise(s) and consequent recommended modifications to the draft SPDs be reported back to the Executive Board for resolution to adopt as Supplementary Planning Documents.

3 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 At the 21st September 2006 Exec Board it was resolved that the third Local Development Scheme (LDS) for Halton be approved by the Council for submission to the Government Office for the North West (GONW). This document sets out the spatial planning policy priorities for the Council, for the next three years. The GONW has informed the Council that they do not intend to amend the content of the LDS.
- 3.2 Included within the LDS programme of works is the production of Town Centre Strategies for Halton Lea, Runcorn and Widnes, to be produced as Supplementary Planning Documents. The purpose of the SPDs is to complement the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP), by providing additional guidance for those involved in the planning of new development within Halton Borough to:
- a) Enable the town centres to prosper without adversely affecting the health of any other;
 - b) Safeguard and strengthen the individual role of each town centre as a safe and accessible place to shop, work and enjoy;
 - c) Co-ordinate public and private investment decisions;
 - d) Improve the economic prosperity of the Borough through the creation of employment opportunities; and
 - e) Ensure the highest standard of design and architecture within each town centre.
- 3.3 The new planning system requires that a record be kept of any consultees, their comments and how they have been taken into account, throughout the production of an SPD. Internal drafts of the Halton Lea, Runcorn and Widnes Town Centre Strategy SPDs were circulated between 2nd September 2005 and 16th September 2005 and a further Partnership Consultation draft was sent to a number of key stakeholders for comment between 25th November 2005 and 9th December 2005. The strategies were also the subject of several meetings with Council officers and members, including the Local Development Framework Working Party. These consultation stages were essentially concerned with obtaining officer and member support for the documents and then seeking technical observations from individuals within organisations that would either use or potentially endorse the document once it becomes

an adopted SPD. The Partnership Consultation therefore did not look for ratification of the documents by those organisations. A list of those consulted, comments received and how these were taken into account is contained in **Appendix 2** of this report.

- 3.4 Another new requirement is that a scoping exercise must be undertaken to see if a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) is required to assess the environmental effects of the SPD. Between 30th June 2005 and 4th August 2005 a Scoping Report was consulted upon in line with the relevant regulations; the conclusion was that a SEA was not required in relation to these SPDs. An additional new requirement in relation to producing a SPD is that a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is produced. The purpose of the SAs are to independently assess the contribution that the Halton Lea and Runcorn Town Centre Strategy SPDs will make to achieving the social, economic and environmental objectives of sustainable development. The two SAs also refer back to the conclusion and responses received in relation to the Scoping Report. SA Reports for Halton Lea and Runcorn (**Appendix 3**) are currently being produced and will be consulted upon at the same time as the respective Town Centre Strategies.
- 3.5 Both the Halton Lea and Runcorn Town Centre Strategy SPDs will be subject to an Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening assessment. An AA is undertaken to assess the potential effect of the SPD on sites of European importance, such as the Ramsar, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) that are within or close to Halton. The Screening Report will conclude whether in the opinion of Halton Borough Council either of the Halton Lea and Runcorn Town Centre Strategy SPDs will or will not require an 'Appropriate Assessment'.
- 3.6 A Supplementary Planning Document is unable to formally designate sites for development. However, it is able to identify development principles for existing opportunities (such as UDP allocations and planning permissions). Sites that are identified as new opportunities in the respective Town Centre Strategy SPDs can, if necessary, be taken forward as designations through the future New Retail and Leisure Development DPD.
- 3.7 It is also of note in this regard that Local Development Scheme 2006/07 programmes in the Widnes Town Centre Area Action Plan to commence preparation during late 2007 as a Development Plan Document (DPD). As a DPD is able to formally designate sites for development, and would be able to deal with the town centre as a cohesive geographic area, this is considered to be an appropriate way forward for dealing with Widnes town centre in the Halton Local Development Framework.
- 3.8 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 be written to the Executive Board, seeking formal

adoption of the Halton Lea and Runcorn Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Planning Documents.

- 3.9 However, if comments are received during the public consultation process which require alterations to be made to one or both of the SPDs that materially affect the content of the document(s) a further period of public consultation may be required regarding those proposed alterations. Officers' experience of producing Supplementary Planning Documents is that this scenario is unusual, but it did occur recently regarding the Provision of Open Space SPD. This required a further report to Executive Board Sub Committee to seek approval for a further period of public consultation, which was time consuming and meant that target dates in the Local Development Scheme were missed. Consequently, recommendation 5) is put forward, namely that authority be delegated to the Operational Director – Environmental and Regulatory Services to approve any further statutory periods of public consultation, on the Halton Lea and Runcorn Old Town SPDs should they be required for the reason explained above.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The SPDs have been produced to ensure that through its function as a Local Planning Authority, the Council: -
- a) Is in accordance with national and regional planning policy and advice.
 - b) Wherever possible meets the priorities of the community it serves, as set out in the Halton Community Strategy and Corporate Plan.
- 4.2 These SPDs directly relate to a number of policies within the Halton Unitary Development Plan. They are particularly intended to provide further detail in relation to policies contained within the Shopping and Town Centres chapter of the UDP.
- 4.3 Both Town Centre Strategy SPDs have the same policy format which includes strategic policies (section 5) followed by policies for specific sub areas within the respective town centres. Common strategic policies relate to matters such as increasing public art, having a co-ordinated approach to street furniture provision, ensuring suitable cycle access and parking and improving directional signage.
- 4.4 There is a mix of key policies that are specific to the Halton Lea town centre strategy. Those that might be considered as expressly relating to development matters deal with a new vehicular access being created from Hallwood Park Road into Trident Park and setting development criteria for the planned extension to the shopping centre across East Lane. Those that can be considered as operational improvements include refurbishing and improving the bus termini or reviewing and rationalising ground level uses underneath Rutland House and Halton

Direct Link. There is also a management related policy, which encourages the setting up a town centre group that would be made up of property owners and other interested parties in the town centre.

4.5 As with Halton Lea, the Runcorn document contains a mix of key policies specific to that centre. The broad thrust of the strategy is to see the centre build upon recent successes and redefine and strengthen its position with regard to the various roles it fulfils, namely;

- providing for the day to day shopping needs of it's immediate catchment;
- offering a wider complementary function to neighbouring town centres, as a focus for local independent shops, niche retailers and service providers; and
- improving facilities to become a centre for cultural and leisure activity.

4.6 Various policies are presented that seek to ensure future development contributes positively towards achieving these aims in addition to those dealing with more management orientated or operational issues such as car park management and general environmental improvements.

5 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 No other known implications.

6 RISK ANALYSIS

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

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 Public consultation upon the draft SPDs will not have any identifiable equality and diversity implications.

8 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

8.1 The alternative options considered with regard to the preparation of this document are set out in the SA Report.

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

<u>Document</u>	<u>Place of Inspection</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>
Halton Unitary Development Plan, April 2005	Planning & Policy Division, Environmental & Regulatory Services, Rutland House.	Neil Macfarlane
Halton Local Development Scheme 2006/07	Planning & Policy Division, Environmental & Regulatory Services, Rutland House.	Neil Macfarlane
Runcorn Old Town and Halton Lea Town Centre Strategies Partnership Consultation Stage (November 2005)	Planning & Policy Division, Environmental & Regulatory Services, Rutland House.	Neil Macfarlane
Sustainability Appraisal Pre Production Scoping Reports June 2005)	Planning & Policy Division, Environmental & Regulatory Services, Rutland House.	Neil Macfarlane