

**REPORT TO:** Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 17 September 2008

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Environment

**SUBJECT:** Progress on the Halton Core Strategy

**WARDS:** Borough-wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To inform the Policy and Performance Board of the progress of the preparation of the Halton Core Strategy.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board notes the policy implications given in the report and supports the drafting of the Core Strategy as a central enabling document in the delivery of Corporate priorities.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The Halton Core Strategy is the central Development Plan Document (DPD) in the Halton Local Development Framework (LDF), providing the overarching structure for the spatial development of the Borough until 2026. The LDF system was introduced in 2004, and its portfolio of documents will eventually replace the saved policies of the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP).

3.2 Between July and September 2006, the Council consulted on the "Issues and Options" stage of the document preparation. This consultation helped to define the scope of the Halton Core Strategy and led on from (and was closely related to) the publication of the Borough's Sustainable Community Strategy earlier in that year. Since then, efforts have been concentrated on developing the broad spatial strategy and policy approaches for the Core Strategy and ensuring that the necessary supporting evidence base is up-to-date.

3.3 The next stage of Core Strategy consultation will be that associated with the "Preferred Options". At the present time, a draft spatial strategy and spatial objectives, as well as seven outlined spatial themes have been identified. These themes are: An Affordable, Decent Home and Neighbourhood; A Balanced and Prosperous Economy; Health, Learning and Social Inclusion; Vital and Vibrant Town Centres; Well Designed Places and Spaces; A Cleaner, Safer, Greener Environment and Sustainable Travel Options.

3.4 In June 2008, the Core Strategy Officer Steering Group was set up, and a series of meetings were held to discuss various "hot topics"

associated with the Preferred Options stage of policy development. The aim of these meetings was to establish spatial approaches to take forward and to engage a wide range of officers in the production of the Core Strategy. Further meetings will be held with officers involved in the Core Strategy Officer Steering Group to develop policy approaches in more detail. From this, specific chapters based around the seven spatial themes will be drafted. It is anticipated that these draft policy approaches and chapters will be taken to the Members' LDF Working Party for discussion later this year, subject to staff resources. Reports on the progress of production of the Core Strategy will be made to the Halton Strategic Partnership, in addition to quarterly reports of progress made to Management Team. Significant developments in the advancement of Preferred Options policy approaches will be reported back to the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board.

- 3.5 As mentioned earlier, due to the requirements of the new planning system, it is essential for the Council to develop an extensive evidence base of studies and reports to inform policy development. Recent progress on this task includes the commissioning of a Joint Employment Land and Premises Study (with Sefton, Knowsley and West Lancashire Councils), and it is anticipated that briefs for both a Retail Study and a Landscape Character Assessment will be brought to tender shortly. The Council is also currently conducting a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA).

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 As discussed above, the Core Strategy is the central document in the Council's LDF, and will provide the overarching spatial planning policy for the Borough until 2026. The Core Strategy will also plan for the spatial delivery of the aims of the Borough's Community Strategy. Hence, once adopted, the document will be an extremely important policy tool for the Council overall, forming part of the development plan along with the Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West (RSS).

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The production of a successful Halton Core Strategy will require cooperation and joint working across the Council, and necessarily has staff and financial resource implications. Once adopted, the Core Strategy should have a wide range of impacts on the activities of the Council and its public and private sector partners, as well as residents of and investors in the Borough.

#### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

The drafting of the Council's Core Strategy could have implications for the children and young people in the Borough over the plan period, both generally due to their important role as Halton residents, and also in

relation to specific policies for example those concerning learning, health and leisure.

## **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

Progress on the drafting of Core Strategy policies relating to employment in the Borough will impact upon this Council priority. In particular, the Core Strategy will contain policies relating to Halton's employment land, such as its quantity, broad location and type. Employment, learning and skills will also be implicated in policy approaches for other areas, such as travel, health and learning.

## **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

It is anticipated that delivering the "Healthy Halton" priority will be a key aim of the Core Strategy, and that all of the policy approaches will seek to improve the health and well being of those who live and work in the Borough. For example, the Core Strategy will seek to establish the principle (alongside the Local Transport Plan) of making Halton a better place to walk and cycle, and will also deal with issues such as the Halton Hospital Campus and facilitating the provision of primary health care within the Borough.

## **6.4 A Safer Halton**

The development of Core Strategy policy approaches will aim to make the Borough a safer place to live and work in and to visit. In particular, policy approaches relating to creating sustainable and prosperous communities, the design of new developments and sustainable travel will attempt to improve the Borough's overall safety.

## **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

The Core Strategy will contain policies relating to the development and regeneration of urban areas within the Borough. In particular, it will broadly identify the locations in which development will be focussed, and provide policy approaches relating to the location and type of employment land, housing developments and retail growth, which will contribute to the improvement of Halton's urban areas. For example, a main focus is likely to be in respect of maximising the assets presented by Halton's waterfronts and waterways to stimulate the wider renaissance of the Borough.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Joint working and cross-Council involvement is expected to minimise risks associated with developing Core Strategy policy approaches. In addition, risks that the Core Strategy will be found to be unsound by a Planning Inspector will be minimised by ensuring that a robust and credible evidence base is in place.

7.2 It is not envisaged that a full risk assessment relating to the Core Strategy would be appropriate at this time.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 No equality and diversity issues are anticipated at this time.

## **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act	Rutland House, Halton Lea	Neil Macfarlane
Halton Unitary Development Plan	Rutland House, Halton Lea	Neil Macfarlane
Halton Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation Documents	Rutland House, Halton Lea	Neil Macfarlane