CABINET

DATE: 29 SEPTEMBER 2015

NORTHUMBERLAND LOCAL PLAN PRE SUBMISSION CORE STRATEGY AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

Report of the Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Councillor Allan Hepple – Economic Growth

Purpose of report

To seek approval for the publication and consultation on the Northumberland Local Plan Pre Submission Core Strategy and associated documents.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Approves the Northumberland Local Plan Pre Submission Core Strategy for consultation;
- Approves the Draft South East Ponteland Supplementary Planning Document for consultation; and
- Delegates authority to the Director of Planning, Economy and Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth to approve any non-material amendments to the final text of the consultation documents prior to commencement of the formal consultation.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the Places and Environment priority included in the Northumberland County Council Corporate Plan 2013-2017.

Key issues

- The Northumberland Core Strategy will:
  - Set out the strategic planning policies of the Council;
- Provide the planning principles to guide future development and planning decisions in Northumberland\(^1\) from 2011 to 2031;
- Set out the general scale and distribution of new development which is required to meet Northumberland’s needs to 2031; and
- Include strategic allocations for housing and employment;

- This is the final stage of consultation prior to the Core Strategy being submitted for Independent Examination;
- In accordance with National Planning Policy the Council must, through the Core Strategy, provide a positive planning policy framework that supports and grows the economy;
- The most significant challenge to the delivery of the vision of the Core Strategy is the profile of the Northumberland population. Without positive policy intervention, projections show that there is likely to be a significant acceleration in the ageing of Northumberland’s population. This change in the age profile has substantial potential to have a significant negative impact on the long term diversity and resilience of communities across Northumberland;
- Without positive policy intervention, Northumberland will not have the working age population to support the delivery of the Economic Strategy;
- There has been significant evidence and engagement work which has informed the Pre Submission Core Strategy document;
- A draft Supplementary Planning Document for the South East Ponteland site has been prepared to provide a master plan framework to ensure that development of the site reflects the objectives as set out within the Core Strategy.

**Background**

1. There has been substantial engagement on the emerging Core Strategy, significantly in excess of the level statutorily required. The most significant public engagement on the emerging Core Strategy commenced in May 2012, at Issues and Options stage. Since then the Council has undertaken three further substantial consultations:
   - Preferred Options (stage 1) – February 2013;
   - Preferred Options (stage 2) – October 2013; and
   - Full draft plan – December 2014.

2. During the four stages of consultation the Council has received almost 40,000 comments from around 5,000 people, and held over 100 events that have been attended by almost 4,500 people. In addition, there have been on-going discussions with key stakeholders including Town and Parish Councils, statutory bodies and developers. Although the Council has not been able to make changes to reflect all of the concerns of everyone that has responded to the various consultations, significant changes have been made to the Core Strategy and additional evidence work prepared to address feedback received.

\(^1\) Excluding Northumberland National Park which is a separate Local Planning Authority and has separate adopted planning policies
3. The Core Strategy has also been informed by significant member input, both through the Local Development Framework Cabinet Advisory Group and seven all Member workshop/briefing sessions.

4. The Council is now required by regulations to consult on a Pre Submission version of the Core Strategy in advance of formal submission to the Government. The Pre Submission consultation is a formal, statutory stage. Responses to the Pre Submission document must relate to the ‘tests of soundness’, which require the plan to be ‘positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy’.

5. Following the consultation on the Pre Submission document, the Core Strategy will be modified where the Council considers that legitimate issues of ‘soundness’ have been raised. The document will then be considered by Full Council and then submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination. During the Examination an Independent Planning Inspector will discuss and consider outstanding issues. The Inspector may suggest further modifications to the Core Strategy before it is formally adopted by the Council.

Core Strategy - Key Issues

6. Previous reports to Cabinet have highlighted the key issues for the Core Strategy and summarised the responses received through consultation. This report does not repeat these issues in detail, it summarises the key issues and the main policy changes that have been proposed following both the consultation on the Full Draft Plan and the significant further evidence work.

Delivering a thriving and competitive economy

7. The economy section of the plan has been updated particularly following the completion of the Employment Land and Premises Demand Study. This has informed the update to the employment land requirements and the distribution of land. The Pre Submission Core Strategy:
   - Provides a range of interconnected sites, equating to 189ha, around the Blyth Estuary to provide for anticipated growth in strategically important sectors;
   - Protects 129ha of land that is most likely to attract business development for that use;
   - Allocates new land for business development in areas where the supply of land is restricted and where there is market demand (new allocations are identified in Hexham, Ponteland, Prudhoe - all requiring Green Belt deletions);
   - Takes a flexible approach to non business development, on 51ha of allocated land, which will be supported on a range of other employment sites where there is already encroachment of other uses;
   - De-allocates available employment land which is:
     - Unlikely to attract future employment uses;
     - Undeliverable due to unsurmountable constraints or costs; and/ or
     - An area with an existing employment allocation which have been developed for other uses which will exclude employment use;
   - Continues to include a windfall employment policy which would be used to assess future large scale inward investment;
   - Provides a strengthened policy approach to: development within town
centres and rural areas; and to supporting tourism and leisure developments.

8. An update of the findings of the Town Centre and Retail study will be provided to Members at both the Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings.

Providing existing and future communities a choice of decent, affordable homes

9. The housing section of the Core Strategy has been informed most significantly by updates to the:
   - Population and household scenario work;
   - Strategic Housing Market Assessment;
   - Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; and
   - Strategic Land Review.

10. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has identified that the objectively assessed housing need over the plan period (2011-2031) is 24,320 equating to 1,216 dwellings per annum. The Core Strategy proposes that this is the housing requirement and that it is split over the four delivery areas as follows:
   - South East 12,840
   - Central 5,940
   - North 4,190
   - West 1,370

11. The overall housing target has increased slightly from that which was proposed in the Full Draft Plan (23,520); the distribution across Delivery Areas remains largely unchanged.

12. The Core Strategy continues to propose to focus the majority of new development in Main Towns and Service Centres. Although it does not allocate a specific housing number to each settlement, it provides a realistic but indicative scale and distribution of housing across each Delivery Area by Main Town, Service Centre and ‘rest of’ Delivery Area. The distribution has been informed by the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment and Strategic Land Review.

13. Strategic Sites in Morpeth and Cramlington continue to be identified within the plan as does the need to revise Green Belt boundaries to accommodate the objectively assessed development needs in Hexham, Ponteland and Prudhoe.

14. The updated SHMA has reassessed the affordable housing need across the County. Three elements have been considered when setting an affordable housing target; affordable housing need, viability and the ability of Registered Providers to deliver affordable homes. The SHMA identifies that the affordable need over a five year period equates to the need to provide 401 dwellings per annum, equating to 2005 dwellings over a five year period. Over this period, the affordable need equates to approximately 30% of the overall housing delivery target of 24,320.

15. Over the next five years, 1,047 affordable houses are forecast to be delivered by both registered providers and the Council. This results in a net requirement for an additional 955 affordable units. Therefore, although there is an overall target for 30% of new houses to be affordable, in order to meet the identified net need, the Core Strategy sets a requirement for 15% of new planning permissions for housing to be
affordable. The policy is clear that the level of need, the amount of affordable housing delivered, and the number of units forecast to be delivered in the future will be monitored and reviewed to reflect new evidence. The Core Strategy is also clear that in some parts of the County there will be a higher need for affordable housing, and that new development will be required to meet the identified need.

16. In addition to those areas identified above, the main changes in the Pre Submission Core Strategy from the full draft plan are:
   - Ponteland is now identified as a Main Town rather than a Service Centre – this is in recognition of the significant investment that will be made in education and leisure provision within the town and better reflects its role;
   - Amendments to sites that are proposed to be removed from the Green Belt in Hexham, Ponteland and Prudhoe;
   - Revisions to the policy approach to housing for older people and vulnerable groups as a result of changes in national guidance that no longer includes ‘lifetime homes’ standards. However, the policy has been strengthened to require developers to demonstrate how proposals have considered the needs of older people and vulnerable groups.

Green Belt

17. The strategic approach to the Green Belt remains unchanged to that which was set out within the Full Draft Plan. As explained above, amendments have been made to proposed Green Belt deletions in Hexham, Ponteland and Prudhoe. A minor change has been made to the proposed Morpeth Inner Green Belt boundary to incorporate land at Coopies Lane Industrial Estate and also to identify allocated employment land to the north of Morpeth.

18. The Core Strategy now provides a consistent approach to the treatment of smaller settlements within the Green Belt which has been informed by: national policy; the strategy to focus the majority of new development in the Main Towns and Service Centres whilst allowing for an appropriate level of development in smaller settlements; Green Belt review; and input from Parish Councils.

19. The Pre Submission Core Strategy continues to define acceptable uses within the Green Belt and provides a positive policy approach for the expansion of employment and visitor related development within the Green Belt.

Other important policy issues

20. The Pre Submission Core Strategy contains many other policies to deliver the vision for Northumberland, they seek to:
   - Conserve and enhance Northumberland’s distinctive and valued natural, historic and built environments;
   - Ensure connectivity and infrastructure delivery;
   - Support community well-being;
   - Effectively manage natural resources; and
   - Ensure that the Core Strategy is effectively implemented.

21. There have been a number of important wording changes to these policies to strengthen the policy approach. These have largely been informed by comments from statutory bodies and other key stakeholders.
Evidence base and legal compliance documents

22. A substantial amount of evidence based studies have been used to inform the Pre Submission Core Strategy. A lot of the evidence work is already published on the Council’s website; all of the updated evidence documents will be available at the start of the consultation.

23. In addition to the evidence base work, a number of legal compliance documents also accompany the Pre Submission Core Strategy. These documents will also be available online at the start of the consultation.

South East Ponteland Supplementary Planning Document

24. The Core Strategy Full Draft Plan highlighted the need for changes to the Green Belt to the South East of Ponteland to support the delivery of improved education and leisure facilities, and in addition new housing and employment development.

25. In the Full Draft Plan the Council highlighted a number of key principles for the development of the site:
   - Improved education and leisure facilities;
   - A mix of types of housing to meet needs and support sustainable communities;
   - New built development, that protects the most sensitive parts of the site from development, minimising impact of the development on the wider Green Belt;
   - Improved accessibility to education provision – reducing congestion in the town;
   - New office development;
   - Improved pedestrian and cycling links to education and leisure provision;
   - Strategic open space/ green wedge;
   - An appropriate mix and location of development that considers the impact of issues such as residential amenity and flood risk; and
   - Includes safeguarded land for future development beyond the plan period.

26. As a result of the complex nature of the site the Council considers there is a need to develop a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to:
   - Provide a master plan framework to ensure that development of the site reflects the objectives as set out within the Core Strategy;
   - Identify key requirements for supporting social, physical and environmental infrastructure to ensure sustainable development;
   - Set out best practice and appropriate standards to be achieved in respect of sustainable design and construction; and
   - Set out a framework for delivery.

27. An initial draft SPD has been prepared for consultation alongside the Pre Submission Core Strategy. This defines:
   - The site and its context, including: evolution of Ponteland; existing land uses; existing access and movement;
   - Green Belt review - findings; and
   - Site characteristics, including: landscape character; landscape features; topography; views; ecology; built environment; archaeology; ground conditions; flood risk; drainage.
28. The draft SPD also proposes a development framework. Given the on-going master planning work this element of the SPD, which comprises mainly drawings, will be circulated at the Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings and will then be included within the SPD. There may be a need to undertake a further consultation on the SPD to reflect on-going work. It was considered important to obtain input from the community at this stage in the preparation of the SPD.

**Engagement**

29. The statutory consultation on the Pre Submission Core Strategy, its associated evidence base and the consultation on the draft Ponteland SPD will take place from the 14 October to 25 November 2015. As with previous consultations on the Core Strategy the Council will be seeking to raise awareness of the consultation in the following ways:
   - Early notification emails to statutory and other consultees, including Town and Parish Councils and those registered on the consultation database;
   - Formal consultation letters and emails – at the start of the consultation period;
   - Leaflet to all addresses in Northumberland;
   - Press releases – before the consultation commences, at the start, middle, towards the end and after the end of the consultation;
   - Use of social media to raise awareness about the start of the consultation – and in advance of consultation events;
   - Clear links on the front page of the Council website;
   - Parish Councils will receive a hard copy of the Core Strategy and will be asked to raise awareness of the consultation;
   - Summary document available and distributed to Council offices/ information points.

30. The Council has received positive feedback on the use of drop in sessions to allow local communities to find out more about the Core Strategy. Therefore 23 drop in events have been arranged across the County, with one session in each Main Town and Service Centre, in a range of locations, and different times of the day/ days of the week.

31. As explained above the Pre Submission consultation is a formal, statutory stage; responses must relate to the ‘tests of soundness’, which require the plan to be ‘positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy’. Response forms will be available to allow people to respond in the required way, and officers will be available to provide guidance.

32. As with previous consultations on the Core Strategy an all Member session will be organised in advance of the start of the consultation.

**Core Strategy next steps**

33. Following the end of the consultation on the Pre Submission Plan, the Council will need to identify the modifications required to respond to legitimate issues of ‘soundness’ raised through the consultation. The document will then be considered by Full Council, and then submitted to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination. During the Examination an Independent Planning Inspector will discuss and consider outstanding issues. The Inspector may suggest further modifications to
the Core Strategy before it is formally adopted by the Council.

34. The key milestones are set out in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Milestone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October – November 2015</td>
<td>Statutory consultation on a Pre Submission Core Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2015 – January 2016</td>
<td>Consideration of responses and preparation of Submission Core Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 2016</td>
<td>Full Council considers Submission Core Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>Submission</td>
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<td>Summer 2016</td>
<td>Examination</td>
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<td>Autumn 2016</td>
<td>Adoption</td>
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**Implications**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>The Core Strategy when adopted will form part of the Council’s policy framework.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finance and value for money</td>
<td>Plan preparation costs will be met from within existing Council’s budgets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Local planning authorities must prepare a Local Plan which sets planning policies in a local authority area. Local plans must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy in accordance with section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the National Planning Policy Framework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Work on the Core Strategy involves both Council Officers and Members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property</td>
<td>The adopted Core Strategy will apply to land and buildings owned by the County Council as they apply to land and buildings owned by others.</td>
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<td>Equalities</td>
<td>Previous drafts of the Core Strategy have been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. An updated Equality Assessment will be published alongside the pre submission Core Strategy consultation document.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Assessment</td>
<td>The preparation of the Northumberland Local Plan has been the subject of a risk assessment.</td>
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Crime & Disorder

Crime and disorder considerations will be taken into account in the preparation of the Core Strategy.

Customer Consideration

The Core Strategy once adopted will bring together and supersede many planning policies from the former County and District Council planning documents into a single document, ensuring consistency in planning policies across the County and thereby making it easier for the public to understand.

Carbon reduction

The emerging Northumberland Core Strategy includes draft policy approaches relating to climate change and carbon reduction.

Wards

All

Background papers:

- Core Strategy Issues and Options (May 2012)
- Core Strategy Preferred Options, Stage 1 (February 2013)
- Core Strategy Preferred Options (stage 2) Housing, Employment and Green Belt consultation document (October 2013)
- Core Strategy Full Draft Plan (December 2014)
- Core Strategy update to Policy Board – 9 June 2015

Report sign off.

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Initials</th>
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<tr>
<td>Finance Officer</td>
<td>JB</td>
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<td>Monitoring Officer/Legal</td>
<td>LH</td>
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<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>SM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio Holder</td>
<td>AH</td>
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Author and Contact Details

Jo-Anne Garrick – Senior Manager, Strategic Planning and Housing
Telephone: 01670 622343
Email: Jo-Anne.Garrick@northumberland.gov.uk