

Agenda Item 11

REPORT TO: Planning Committee
Cabinet

DATE: 19th August 2009
3rd September 2009

SUBJECT: Core Strategy – Report of Early Consultation

WARDS AFFECTED: All

REPORT OF: Andy Wallis, Planning & Economic Regeneration Director

CONTACT OFFICER: Steve Matthews

**EXEMPT/
CONFIDENTIAL:** No

PURPOSE/SUMMARY:

To update Members on the outcome of consultation on the Core Strategy and summarise the issues that have emerged from it and from recent studies, so that these can be taken on board in preparing the Preferred Strategy stage of the Core Strategy.

REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:

The Local Development Framework process requires that Members are informed of the results of consultation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Planning Committee:

- notes the key issues arising from consultation and recent studies, as outlined in this report
- draws to Cabinet's attention any other major issue which it considers ought to be addressed at the next stage of preparing the Core Strategy

That Cabinet:

- agrees that the issues outlined in this report should be addressed in the Preferred Strategy stage of the Core Strategy, and
- highlights any other issues which it thinks ought to be addressed in the Core Strategy

KEY DECISION: No

FORWARD PLAN: No

IMPLEMENTATION DATE: N/A

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ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

None. Government guidance is clear that the outcome of consultation on the emerging Core Strategy should be reported to Members, identifying key issues which have emerged.

IMPLICATIONS:

Budget/Policy Framework: N/A

Financial: N/A

<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>	2006/ 2007 £	2007/ 2008 £	2008/ 2009 £	2009/ 2010 £
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

Legal:

Risk Assessment: N/A

Asset Management: N/A

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS

The Finance Director has confirmed that there are no financial consequences arising from this report.

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community	✓		
2	Creating Safe Communities	✓		
3	Jobs and Prosperity	✓		
4	Improving Health and Well-Being	✓		
5	Environmental Sustainability	✓		
6	Creating Inclusive Communities	✓		
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy	✓		
8	Children and Young People	✓		

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Core Strategy will be the first of a series of Development Plan Documents (DPDs) produced that will ultimately replace the Unitary Development Plan. It will set out the vision, strategy and core policies for the 'spatial' development of Sefton over the next 15 to 20 years.
- 1.2 An essential part of the preparation of the Core Strategy is to involve those with an interest in the area – residents, businesses and other organisations. The first stage of consultation has just been completed. The aim was to obtain a wide range of views about the issues that must be tackled and to seek views on how we should do this.
- 1.3 The consultation carried out in spring and early summer this year has been intensive. There have been presentations to Area Committees and parish councils, voluntary organizations, traders and residents groups, access groups, older people's groups, a parenting group, and a variety of young people's groups. One of the ways of involving young people was an excellent event at Aintree Racecourse in June. This was organized by the Young Advisors and Planning Aid for schools which represented most of the communities across the borough.
- 1.4 There have been individual meetings with a range of organisations which have an interest in the Borough, and with other departments of the Council. All told, there have been around 100 presentations, workshops and meetings which have proved to be a rich source of information. Much of this will influence the shape of the Core Strategy.
- 1.5 The approach to consultation was endorsed by the Council's Consultation and Engagement Standards Panel in January 2009, and a report on the process was reviewed and commended by the Panel in July 2009.

2. Progress to date

- 2.1 A number of methods were used to raise awareness of the Core Strategy. Presentations were given to Area Committees and Parish Councils, partner organisations and local groups. The Council's web-site drew attention to how people could get involved in the Core Strategy. A leaflet was included in all Council Tax Bills sent out in March 2009, highlighting some of the issues Sefton faces and encouraging people to contribute to the process.
- 2.2 To raise awareness further and as part of gathering evidence, discussions were held with a wide range of potential stakeholders including the Environment Agency, United Utilities, the PCT, and Peel Ports. These discussions also formed part of the consultation and helped us understand what issues these organisations currently face or anticipate in the future, and how the Core Strategy could help them implement their plans and strategies.
- 2.3 A significant element of the consultation took place through seven workshops held in each Area Committee area between April and June. The aim was to build up a picture of the key issues and opportunities by targeting a wide range of interests within those areas. Local members were asked to suggest names of anyone who would be likely to be interested in making a contribution to these discussions. Over 230 people

in total attended these workshops and around 60 groups and organisations were represented.

- 2.4 This included Area Committee members, Parish Councillors, local environmental, voluntary and faith groups, local businesses through the Business Village Partnerships and the Chamber of Commerce, Housing Associations and developers. Most attendees received an invitation as they represented a group or organisation with a significant local interest in the issues to be discussed. Local residents also had an opportunity to be involved as workshops were publicised on the Internet and 15 members of the Citizens Panel were invited to each one. The workshops were generally well received with participants raising many interesting issues and welcoming their chance to discuss local issues.
- 2.5 The discussion at each workshop were chaired by people who were not directly connected with the Core Strategy to encourage a more objective process. These were mainly officers from other teams within the Planning and Economic Regeneration Department, other departments within the Council, from Sefton CVS or from the independent planning charity, Planning Aid.
- 2.6 There were also significant attempts made to engage with more seldom heard groups within the Borough by holding separate discussions or events. Discussions were held with organisations including ABILITY, Sefton Older Person's Forum, South Sefton Business Forum, traders' and residents' groups and a Parenting group. A separate Youth consultation event organised by Young Advisors and Planning Aid was also organised to gain the views of teenagers (14-15 years old) living in different parts of Sefton. Planning Aid and staff from Savio High also ran two activity sessions in local schools which helped us discuss planning issues with Primary school age children in Bootle (at St Robert Belarmine RC Primary – 10 years old) and Formby (at a Formby Schools Voice session: 10-12 years old) and to discover their views on their local area.
- 2.7 Five letters were received from children at St Robert Belarmine school on a wide range of issues. Their letters were very thoughtful and contain many helpful insights, including the need for facilities for young people, the importance of exercise to health and the value of green spaces within the community.

3. Summary of issues arising from consultation

- 3.1 The workshops considered four themes. These were:

- Housing
- Jobs and the economy
- Protecting and enhancing the environment and Climate Change
- Town and local centres, facilities and services and getting around

The following section of the report summarises the key issues raised at the workshops together with views of organisations and individuals who were consulted separately. The draft findings of a number of studies are also referred to where appropriate.

Housing

- 3.2 Workshop participants were made aware of the requirement in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) that Sefton should provide for 500 new homes a year over the next

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15 years. This figure was broken down for each settlement area according to population to give greater clarity of what the impact might be for each local community. Participants were advised on alternative ways of meeting the need for new homes including, in broad terms, brownfield land, green space and the Green Belt. There was consensus in workshops across the Borough that this target was unachievable in the built-up area, as there was not sufficient land available. This view is supported by the emerging Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, which suggests there is only enough land within current settlement areas to satisfy RSS housing targets for 7–10 years. Constraints to development such as green space, the Green Belt, protected nature sites and flood risk were highlighted. The Environment Agency confirmed that flood risk is a major constraint on expanding the built-up area of Sefton.

- 3.3 Workshop participants were then asked to identify what they thought were the key housing needs of people in their local area. The need for more affordable homes and a better mix of housing types and tenures was raised in every workshop. One Vision Housing confirmed that there is an acute shortage of social housing across the Borough, with long waiting lists, particularly in the north of the Borough. This is also supported by the findings of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, which concluded that there is a significant affordable housing need, particularly in Southport.
- 3.4 Many people also thought there was more demand for family housing than flats and that more bungalows were needed for the elderly. The requirement for 'Lifetime Homes' was considered significant as many people felt it was important that homes were flexible to respond to people's changing needs. This was reinforced the Director of Health and Social Care who felt that provision for people with special housing needs should be incorporated into new developments, and that new homes should ideally be designed for a person's whole lifetime. The need for new Care Homes to be provided particularly in the north of the Borough was also highlighted.
- 3.5 During workshops, participants were also asked for their opinions on where future housing development could take place. Some possible sites were raised in all of the workshops. The general consensus was that future housing development should take place within the existing built up area giving priority to previously used sites and empty homes. Concern was also raised in all areas adjoining the countryside, that once development was allowed in the Green Belt, this could act as a precedent and so would need to be sensitively handled to ensure the majority of the Green Belt continued to be protected from development.

Jobs and the economy

- 3.6 Workshop participants were asked whether we should be trying to provide for jobs by identifying land in local areas. Opinion expressed varied considerably between workshops. General opinion in Formby, and to a lesser extent Sefton East Parishes, was that these areas were commuter settlements and therefore local residents would not generally need employment provided locally. This was in marked contrast to opinion in the south of the Borough where many felt the provision of local jobs should be a priority. Many wanted better training that would have a stronger connection to job opportunities. People in these areas were also concerned about poor access to some employment areas.
- 3.7 This previous point directly influenced discussion on whether more employment land

was needed in the local area to accommodate these new jobs. Formby participants in particular were generally against providing much additional employment land. However in Southport, the consensus was that there was a considerable shortage of suitable high quality office space and general employment land in the area. The findings of the recent Employment Land and Premises Study confirms this situation, identifying shortages of employment land in the north, and highlighting the need to protect existing sites across the Borough. This was echoed by the Sefton Chamber of Commerce, which highlighted the need for high quality industrial and business units to replace a lot of the unsuitable stock that currently exists and restricts local businesses. On a similar theme, in several areas people suggested improving the appearance and infrastructure of employment sites to ensure existing employment land is used to its full potential.

- 3.8 In many workshops, but particularly in the south of the Borough, the lack of start-up units for new small businesses was considered a significant issue, and has been identified in the Employment Land and Premises Study (para 11.81).
- 3.9 The rural economy was raised as an issue in workshops where there were representatives from the rural area – including Sefton East Parishes and Crosby. Frustration was expressed that the Council did not seem to be adequately support this sector emerged. (This issue is being addressed at the sub-regional level, as the Mersey Partnership is undertaking a Merseyside Rural Economy Study).
- 3.10 The Port was a significant focus for discussion in both the Bootle and Crosby workshops. Participants in both areas recognised the major contribution the Port makes to the local economy, but also raised significant environmental concerns relating to traffic and noise. Peel Ports themselves also identified these as constraints, but are clear that the Port must expand if it is to maintain its role as a national and regional influence driver and help achieve one of the key objectives of the Multi Area Agreement.

Protecting & enhancing the environment and climate change

- 3.11 Workshop participants were asked first to say what the most important features of their local environment were. Those in coastal areas all stressed the coast in general and sand dunes as valued features. The general opinion across all workshops and also at the Youth Event was that they valued their local green spaces and felt strongly that they should be protected from development. The Rimrose Valley was a treasured green space for those in Litherland and Ford. During sessions with children from St Robert Belarmine, and the Youth Event, good quality green spaces with facilities for all ages were a common aspiration, as the young people recognised the health benefits of such areas. Many considered that the quality of some local parks needed to be improved. However, as well as parks, many participants in the north of the Borough, and also some of those in the denser urban areas in the south, valued other aspects of 'Green Infrastructure' such as street trees. (Green Infrastructure is the network of natural environment and green spaces that lie within and between towns and villages that provide many social, economic and environmental benefits) Many workshop participants and the pupils from St Robert Belarmine Primary identified areas where Green Infrastructure could be enhanced and linkages to other areas improved. This is recognised by RSS and the Environment Agency who stress the importance of recognising Green Infrastructure in providing the necessary context for future development.

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- 3.12 Many workshop participants in the north of the Borough, particularly Formby and Southport, valued their local townscape and Victorian heritage highly as they felt it influences the character of the local area. They believed that too many new developments did not respect this and in many cases eroded it. It is acknowledged that in many Conservation Areas there is pressure for the demolition of older buildings and intensive re-build and infill developments, with a resulting dilution of historic character.
- 3.13 In relation to climate change and its effects, participants at the Youth Event in particular recognised this as a considerable concern for Sefton in the future but all at the workshops recognised the challenge it presented. Flooding was a concern in some areas, particularly from the sea in coastal locations. Of those who were concerned, many agreed that the risk of flooding would probably increase in the future. People agreed that Sefton needs to remain aware of the uncertainties of climate change, especially rising sea levels and increased storminess that could increase coastal erosion rates. This was a particular issue raised by Formby participants and is reinforced by the fact that Formby, and particularly Formby Point, is identified as one of the most vulnerable parts of the Sefton coast in terms of erosion rates.
- 3.15 Many people attending the workshops recognised the contribution of domestic energy consumption to CO₂ emissions and therefore climate change. As a result several suggested that new and existing homes should be made more energy efficient. The need to recycle and issues surrounding this were raised in almost every workshop.

Town and local centres, facilities and services and getting around

- 3.16 It was agreed that all town and district centres need investment if they are to continue to be a vibrant place of choice for people to shop, supported by a good range of other facilities. A particular concern expressed through all the workshops was about the closure of small local shops. Many thought this was due to competition from supermarkets and in some cases, high retail rents, for reducing profitability. The experience of many has been a cycle of decline with the closure of shops and services in local centres mixed with a poor quality physical environment leading to further closures and declining quality. Workshop participants as well as school children from St Robert Belarmine, young people from Ykids (Bootle) and the Youth Event wanted their local centres strengthened to provide better facilities locally.
- 3.17 Participants were also asked to identify gaps in the provision of services and facilities in their local community. There was a universal view that facilities for young people, which were accessible and affordable, were lacking across the whole of Sefton. Young people at the Youth Event confirmed this view and during the Formby Voice session, pupils stated that although the new Pool had improved facilities, there was still very little to do especially in the evenings or at weekends. Many areas identified gaps in the provision of community and sports facilities or complained that access to existing ones was inadequate from some locations. Again this issue was also raised strongly at the Youth Event.
- 3.18 Access to health facilities was a concern in many areas across the Borough. Specifically workshops in the south revealed that many people found it difficult to access the main facility at Litherland Town Hall and were critical of the move of more locally based health services to this location. Access by public transport to local

hospitals was also deemed inadequate, which is an issue acknowledged within the Council's Transport team.

- 3.19 Bootle's lack of some types of leisure facilities (such as a cinema and restaurants) was raised in a number of workshops in the south of the Borough. Participants felt this weakened Bootle's position as a town centre as local residents had to travel to out of town retail parks or to Crosby to use these facilities. It also meant that few people used the town centre in the evenings. Some felt that this contributed to increased anti-social behaviour and a resultant fear of crime in the area during the evening.
- 3.20 There was considerable concern shown by Workshop participants about congestion and pollution on main routes through Sefton, including the A565 (particularly through Crosby/ Waterloo) and Dunningbridge Road. The Council's Environmental Protection Director shares these concerns. These locations are monitored due to their designation as Air Quality Management Areas, and as a result, the impact of new developments on these and other marginal areas will need to be considered.
- 3.21 Meanwhile in Southport, different issues regarding local facilities emerged. The retail quality of the Town Centre is perceived as declining as it loses out to areas with more choice such as Manchester, Cheshire Oaks or the new Liverpool One development. This threat is recognised by many stakeholders, including the Sefton Chamber of Commerce who hope that increasing the amount of high quality retail floorspace will give the centre a boost. It is also anticipated that plans for some form of new Cultural Centre will also help improve Southport's status as a destination and 'Classic Resort'. Many also highlight the need for better linkages to be made between the town centre and the seafront.
- 3.22 A major issue for Southport surrounds access. The difficult road access from motorways and poor rail links to some destinations was seen as a factor that was holding back development. Workshop participants and local businesses alike felt that parking issues also contributed to this.
- 3.23 Rural areas were generally regarded as having the greatest deficiencies in public transport. However many of the more outlying urban estates were also regarded as poorly served and most areas highlighted some deficiencies and complained of a lack of service at evenings and weekends. This was a significant concern of participants at the Youth Event who often relied on public transport to get around and felt it needed to be made a more attractive, convenient and cheaper option. It was suggested that Sefton needs a better-integrated public transport system that provides quicker, more direct links to key locations.
- 3.24 Access to facilities for disabled people was a concern for a number of Workshop participants, members of ABILITY and some pupils at St Robert Belarmine School.
- 3.25 Many workshop participants expressed their support for making it easier for people to choose more sustainable transport modes including walking and cycling. Most believed more cycle routes needed to be provided in order to achieve this. Southport workshop participants were supportive of the town's Cycle Town status and believed it should be used to a greater extent to enhance local cycling facilities and promote cycle use.

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Opportunities

- 3.26 Through the course of the workshops, several opportunities were highlighted. One theme that emerged was that the Council and its partners should make more of the coast and the leisure opportunities it offered – both natural and built. In Crosby there was strong feeling that there had been a missed opportunity with regards the 'Another Place' attraction. There was a wide agreement that there needed to be facilities provided for visitors and support for local enterprise to provide some of these (e.g. a café or shop) and better links to Waterloo centre. This is something the Council is already aware of and the major plans for the Crosby Waterfront area, including development of a new Observatory and the recently completed Water Centre will go some way towards addressing this.
- 3.27 Workshop participants in many areas identified another asset which they considered was underused - the Canal. Many realise its benefits as a feature of the area, and believe its potential could be exploited more for leisure, or as a feature in new developments.
- 3.28 A number of those attending workshops in central Sefton also highlighted rural businesses as an opportunity for economic growth. They believed small businesses in the more rural areas should be supported.
- 3.29 **Summary of issues and implications:**
- There is a difficulty in meeting housing land supply within the built-up area purely by developing brown field sites.
 - A particular need exists for more affordable homes throughout the Borough, but especially in the north.
 - There is a need to protect employment land across the whole Borough to meet future needs.
 - There is a need to explore opportunities for further employment land in the north of the Borough, but there are very few obvious sites within the built up area. Sites immediately adjoining the built-up area are generally in the Green Belt and some are at risk of flooding, or protected nature sites.
 - Local people value their local green spaces – whether parks or other nature sites – and believe that they should be protected from future development, and where appropriate, enhanced.
 - Future development must take account of flooding which was a concern of many residents, who realised this was likely to become a greater risk in the future.
 - There was a consensus that town centres needed to be strengthened because of their vital role in providing local facilities and services. Many were concerned about the closure of small local retailers and felt this was a sign of decline, which needed to be halted.
 - Gaps in facilities were identified – particularly for young people, and the need for better access to health services was also highlighted.
 - Valued features such as the Canal and coast should be enhanced, and were appropriate, positively exploited.

4. Conclusions and next steps

- 4.1 This early consultation on issues which should be addressed by the Core Strategy has confirmed a lot of what is already known about the Borough through previous consultation. The process has been valuable in highlighting the strength of feeling in different parts of the Borough areas about different topics, and has given a useful perspective on possible local responses. There is much which can helpfully be discussed further with other agencies e.g. NHS Sefton and Merseytravel.
- 4.2 A number of matters have been raised which will not be able to be dealt with through the Core Strategy – these are being passed on to other departments or organisations who are in a better position to deal with them. In addition, there are many issues not identified in the consultation which will need to be addressed through the Core Strategy e.g. how our Strategy might link into the wider Merseyside area.
- 4.2 Elsewhere on this agenda are reports on studies which are providing the evidence which is essential to support the Core Strategy. These relate to developing an understanding of flood risk and an assessment of the housing market. These, and other studies, together with the outcome of the consultation, are key sources of information in devising a preferred strategy.
- 4.3 The next stage will be to draw up a number of possible ‘spatial’ strategies (i.e. which can be shown on a plan of the borough) which can help to address the issues raised through consultation and the other matters which national and regional policy requires us to include. This work will continue through the autumn and we will report back to Committee later in the year.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that Planning Committee:
- notes the key issues arising from consultation and recent studies, as outlined in this report
 - draws to Cabinet’s attention any other major issue which it considers ought to be addressed at the next stage of preparing the Core Strategy
- 5.2 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- agrees that the issues outlined in this report should be addressed in the Preferred Strategy stage of the Core Strategy, and
 - highlights any other issues which it thinks ought to be addressed in the Core Strategy