

Shaping Places Consultation – position statement for 15th November 2013 Scrutiny meeting

Once adopted in 2015, Shaping Places will be the new Local Plan for the borough, setting out the amount, type and location of development in the borough up to 2031.

There are a number of key stages in the process of developing the plan, including consulting on a Strategy & Options document which took place in June and July 2013. The document sought views on the proposed strategy for development which would then be used to inform the Local Plan. This work is currently in progress and there will be a further consultation in Spring 2014 on the contents of the draft plan, including the allocation of sites.

The purpose of this note is respond to a number of points raised by Scrutiny, including:

- Consultation process to date
- Analysis of feedback – how many, who, what did they say, any gaps?
- How the feedback will influence detailed proposals
- The proposed consultation process for the detailed proposals including with partners
- Key risks for the Council
- How the Strategic Housing Market Assessment feeds into the Plan

A subsequent report has also been requested once the detailed options proposals are available. This has been interpreted as the site allocation options which are expected to be available for comment in April 2014. However, given the nature of the above enquires, it is proposed to bring back to Scrutiny in January 2014 the consultation plan for the Spring consultation to ensure it addresses the points raised. It is proposed to do this in January 2014.

Consultation process to date

In accordance with being a Co-operative Council, engagement in the plan making process is on-going and not confined to the two formal 6 week periods before and after the production of the draft local plan. To date this has included:

- Early 2012: public engagement - road shows, competition, on-line forum, press releases and questionnaires gathering views on what people considered the local plan needed to address
- Mid-late 2012: targeted engagement sessions to assist development of the Strategy & Options Document
- Early 2013: pre-consultation targeted engagement sessions, seeking feedback on broad contents of Strategy & Options document, reflecting how earlier comments were being addressed
- 10 June - 26 July 2013: formal consultation on the Strategy & Options document – 2 public open sessions, one-to-one meetings with Parishes and Town Councils, email contact with all 450 members of Telford & Wrekin Councils Community Panel, session with Young Persons Forum, direct contact with 1652 consultees registered on data-base including 1195 letters to statutory consultees, Twitter & Facebook campaign, Radio Shropshire interview, Your Voice article and advertising in public facing Council buildings (leisure centres, community centres, First Points & libraries).

The shaping places website www.telford.gov.uk/shapingplaces is kept up-to-date to ensure people understand the process and opportunities to comment and continue to be involved.

Analysis of feedback – how many, who, what did they say?

In early 2012, 365 responses were received from the general public and organisations. Headline messages received included: *the importance of green space, attracting businesses to create jobs, the need for more independent shops and encouraging more sustainable forms of transport (walking, cycling, public transport).*

Taking into account the issues raised by the public, subsequent targeted engagement involved: Ward Members, Parish & Town Councils, Developers & Agents, Telford Business Board, Local Strategic Partnership, Homes & Communities Agency and Internal T&WC services (Highways, School provision, Housing, Business, Property, Social Care, Environmental Maintenance). Key messages included: *balancing benefits of growth to local economy with protecting open space, maintaining infrastructure and having adequate public transport (Parish/Town Councils), need for broad mix of housing, viable communities and retention of local identity (Ward members), certainty from the plan to allow investment in sites (House builder), knowing the location and amount of future development ensures services can be planned to provide needs (West Mercia Police), opportunities for senior executives to live in borough (Telford Business Board), need for plan needs to reduce inequality between communities (PCT/Health & Wellbeing Board) and help manage land assets (HCA).*

Information gathered informed the contents of the Strategy & Options document. Details were also shared with other service areas to assist their service planning (e.g. public transport).

During the June-July consultation, 1471 comments were received from 158 consultees, including representatives of larger groups/parishes. A full list of consultees, along with their comments is available from the on-line portal at www.telford.gov.uk/shapingplaces. In general, a wide range of consultees responded, including members of the public, parishes, housebuilders, local businesses and statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency and English Heritage. It was noted that a number of people that provided verbal feedback at the open sessions did not follow this up in writing. While their comments were recorded and are being taken into account, they have not been included in the response figures and will not constitute a formal representation.

Key messages from the consultation include:

Vision: Overall support but a need to better evidence the 200,000 population projection, more emphasis on green infrastructure (including ecological considerations) and on tourism and culture

Scale of growth: general support for proposed growth but with need to justify option 3 (26,500) with appropriate evidence. Questions were also raised regarding the achievability of this scale of growth and its potential impact on green spaces. Communities potentially affected by development including those in the fringe (such as Eyton and Wappenshall) raised concerns for the scale of growth. Comments also suggested that option 3 lacked an economic dimension. Also developers challenged the delivery of committed development – proposing that not all existing commitments will come forward and be delivered and therefore the need to consider SHLAA sites to address this shortfall.

Spatial distribution : broad support given for option 3. Comments confirmed the importance of the careful strategic phasing of development to ensure that delivery of existing urban sites and achievement of priorities are not jeopardised by the development of greenfield sites in the urban fringe.

Policy: general support for a more flexible, criteria based policy approach to most topic areas. Comments reinforced the identified need to strengthen business development opportunities in centres and villages, utilising brownfield land and providing a mix of housing which meets a range of local needs.

Gaps?

Through-out the process, the councils Community Engagement Team, PR and Equalities Officer have been involved and, in accordance with the Cabinet approved Statement of Community Involvement, methods employed to reach all members of the community.

The value of on-going engagement is that there is always scope to learn from earlier experiences and build upon the positives. For example, the Young Persons Forum session was particularly encouraging and further involvement of schools is welcomed. During plan preparation, the Environment & Planning Policy Team have accommodated around 10 work experience students and seen the benefit of involving young people who's future will be influenced by the plan.

It is appreciated that the very nature of the Local Plan may mean that it is difficult to digest by a non-technical audience. While every effort was made to make the Strategy & Options document user friendly, the challenge was to balance this with the need to meet the statutory requirements and get the plan to the next stage, the ultimate goal being to have an adopted plan in 2015. A summary leaflet was also produced.

The team are open to suggestions and will continue to engage with community advisors to ensure information continues to be accessible.

How the feedback will influence detailed proposals

These comments are now being considered in the preparation of the draft plan, along with the findings from evidence studies and the sustainability appraisal. The Council also has to ensure the plan is in conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework and supported by evidence to ensure it is found sound at the Examination stage.

While each comment received has been acknowledged, it has not been possible to respond to each point raised. However, should anyone wish to receive feedback on a specific comment then they can make contact with the team. Likewise, the team are always willing to attend meetings. Since the close of the consultation, talks have been given to a number of community groups.

A Statement of Public Participation will also accompany the draft Local Plan which will provide details of the consultation, comments received and how they have been taken into consideration in the plan.

The proposed consultation process for the detailed proposals including with partners

Work is currently underway in producing the draft Local Plan. A report will be taken to Cabinet in December 2013 to provide an update on the approach to the plan, taking into account the comments received. This will also include information on the approach to Site Allocations which will be consulted on in the Spring 2014.

In terms of the proposed consultation process, it is planned to continue the approach currently taken, engaging with the wide range of partners previously referred to and taking on board suggested improvements. As the next stage will involve details of potential site allocations, it is considered that this may attract more interest as people will be able to relate to it better compared to broad locations which were included in the Strategy & Options document.

It is proposed to bring the consultation plan for the Spring consultation to Scrutiny in January 2014 to ensure it addresses the points raised during this Scrutiny review.

Key risks for the Council

Ensuring the plan is produced in accordance with the statutory consultation process, reduces the risk of non-conformity with the regulations. The approach taken has gone over and above this to ensure engagement is on-going and in accordance with being a Co-operative Council. Engagement with relevant community engagement professionals also ensures that the process is inclusive and accords with equality requirements.

How the Strategic Housing Market Assessment feeds into the plan

The NPPF requires the Council to “...plan for housing based on current and future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community”. The plan should “...identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required”.

To establish this level of need or requirement over the plan period up to 2031, the Council commissioned a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) to update the one which had been completed in 2010. The SHMA:

- Estimates future population and household size and profile by age and type
- Analyses past and current housing market trends and factors which affect demand and supply
- Indicates the type of housing required e.g. affordable (social and affordable rent), intermediate (shared ownership) and Market (owner occupier), taking into account the needs of particular groups such as families, young people, older people, key workers, black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people, etc.

Completing a SHMA takes time due to the amount of data that needs analysing. It is envisaged that it will be complete by the end of the year so that the findings can inform the emerging Local Plan.

The Strategy & Options document was able to draw on the 2010 study and sought comments on the general approach to housing policy rather than specific figures. For example, people were asked if they agreed with the proposed approach to include a policy for mixed housing or separate affordable housing targets rather than a single borough-wide one. The draft Local Plan will seek comments on actual draft policies which will have been informed by the SHMA. This will include affordable housing percentages.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this note has been to explain to Scrutiny the nature of the Shaping places consultation process to date and how the feedback will influence future proposals. As a Co-operative Council, engagement in the plan making process has been ongoing with a number of opportunities for the community to get involved. While response rates have been positive, it is recognised that due to the nature of Local Plan material, it is not always accessible to a non-technical audience and steps have and will continue to be made to improve response rates, taking advice from the community engagement team.

It is considered that the next stage in Spring 2014, involving actual site proposals may help people to relate to the plan and encourage their participation. A consultation plan will be brought to Scrutiny in January 2014 to assist this process.

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