
Report to
Council

6th July 2010

Report of
Director of City Services & Development Directorate

Title
Coventry Core Strategy

1 Purposes of the Report

1.1 The purposes of this report are to:

- 1 bring to Members' attention the report by the Planning Inspectorate following the independent examination of the Coventry Core Strategy and
- 2 to identify an appropriate course of action following the letter from the Secretary of State for Communities & Local Government saying that Regional (Spatial) Strategies are to be abolished.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Council is recommended to

- 1 suspend further work on the Coventry Core Strategy, pending the publication of further legislation and/or further advice from the Government regarding arrangements following the proposed abolition of the Regional Strategy; and
- 2 instruct officers to explore the options available for putting in place a Core Strategy that reflects the wishes of the Council for future development and report back to the Council.

3. Information/Background

3.1 Core Strategies were introduced as part of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. They are intended to enhance the strategic role of local authorities, and set the vision for policies and spatial change. The spatial strategy is based on the principles of sustainability using land effectively and efficiently. This means not wasting land (for example, by allowing it to become derelict), providing easy movement and ensuring that employment, education and leisure opportunities are within easy reach of everyone.

3.2 Core Strategies were intended to be developed within the framework established by the Regional Strategy (RS). If they did not reflect this strategic framework they would not have been considered 'sound' by an Inspector and would not be able to form part of the statutory Development Plan for an area. The announcement of the abolition of RS's,

without currently any guidance to advise how the future statutory process will operate means there is now significant uncertainty about how matters will progress.

- 3.3 Coventry's Core Strategy has been under preparation since Autumn 2005. There has been extensive consultation, in excess of the statutory requirements, ongoing since that time. Early engagement took place with a number of local stakeholders including Coventry Partnership (LSP), the Coventry Community Empowerment Network and other well-established networks and forums including; Coventry By Design and the Residents Liaison Group. This helped to identify issues for the Core Strategy.
- 3.4 On 17 March 2009, the City Council approved the Core Strategy Proposed Submission Document. This was published for pre-submission representations from 19 March 2009 until 7 May 2009.
- 3.5 The Secretary of State appointed an independent Inspector to conduct an examination to determine whether the Core Strategy is sound and legally compliant. The examination was held during November 2009, which culminated in the Council being sent the Inspector's Report on 27th May 2010. The report is binding, as are all Inspectors' Reports under the current planning regime. It states that subject to amendment in accordance with the recommendations made, Coventry's Core Strategy is sound. The recommendations consisted of minor editorial changes and addition/deletion of specific site allocations, particularly in relation to proposed residential development. Details of the recommendations are highlighted in bold at the end of each section of the Inspector's report, which is available in full on the Council's web site <http://www.coventry.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/environment/planning/local-development-framework/core-strategy/core-strategy-examination/>
All those who engaged in the examination in public and a large number of other interested groups, individuals and organisations have been notified of its publication.
- 3.6 The Core Strategy was approved by the City Council for Submission to the Secretary of State following a lengthy debate at Council, during which concern was expressed by a number of Members as to the appropriate amount of development the City Council should be planning for. In particular the necessity to develop Green Belt and Greenfield sites was questioned.
- 3.7 With the pending abolition of the RS it would be prudent to consider whether, in the light of the proposal contained in the Secretary of State's letter, that levels of development should be determined locally, these issues should be revisited
- 3.8 It must be recognised that there are some existing Greenfield sites that have previous approvals for development e.g. as part of the Canley Regeneration Area and school rebuilding schemes, and as part of the statutory Coventry Development Plan 2001. There are also some small pockets of degraded land, which whilst not currently developed could play a more positive role in improving and contributing to the quality of the local environment if suitable development were to go ahead
- 3.9 During the course of the examination, the Inspector considered proposals for a number of individual sites. These were either proposed for development by the City Council or by others. Those put forward by others are referred to as 'omission sites'.

Employment [Policies SG14 – SG18]

Key Issues

- 3.10 The Inspector supported the strategy, including the identification and protection of Strategic Employment Sites, and the 'minimum reservoir' approach to bringing forward new employment sites. In response to sustained challenge to the validity of the proportions of new jobs expected to be accommodated within the city centre, by the two universities, and by the University Hospital Walsgrave, the Inspector accepted that these detailed numbers were unnecessary. The restriction on Storage & Distribution uses was supported, however the minimum number of jobs thresholds for sites is removed.
- 3.11 Two key sites were subject to representations:
1. Land at Willenhall Triangle was proposed by the Council as a new allocation to provide jobs, this was resisted by the Highways Agency; and
 2. Land to the east of Orchard/Airport Retail Park at Toll Bar was proposed to be allocated by the Council to provide jobs, and the owner also put forward land further to the east, which was resisted by the Council
- 3.12 The Inspector decided that the land at Willenhall Triangle should be deleted, and replaced by the land to the east of Orchard Retail Park. He decided that, notwithstanding its status as a local nature reserve, it has gradually degraded from a meadow to scrub, and that development on the site (with a 30m buffer to the woodland) would enable management of the remainder to the overall benefit of biodiversity and secure the long term future of the Local Nature Reserve through appropriate planning conditions/obligations.

Housing

Site Specifics and Figures

- 3.13 As part of the Core Strategy Hearings some housing tables were updated to reflect the latest information and these have been further refined in the final report. These reflect the Inspector's proposed changes to a number of sites and categories, and include:
1. The deletion of the Re-use of Empty Homes (2,160 dwellings) and its replacement with a small site/former employment site windfall allowance over the life time of the plan (2,400 dwellings).
 2. The deletion of the Green Belt sites at Lentons Lane (160 dwellings) and Cromwell Lane (390 dwellings).
 3. The expansion of the proposed reserved site boundary at Duggins Lane to reflect a proposed omission site (put forward by Benfield Homes), and subsequent increase in capacity from 50 to 70 dwellings.
 4. The deletion of the proposed allocation of the Bestway building at Banner Lane (220 dwellings) due to the uncertainty about its delivery within the plan period.
 5. The increase in site capacity at Walsgrave Hill Farm to 900 dwellings with a subsequent alteration to the site boundary. This change includes the removal of an area of land in the Green Belt.
 6. The increase in site capacity at the proposed Keresley eco-suburb to 3,600 dwellings with the removal of defined development parcels.
 7. The inclusion of 3 "omission" sites (not put forward by the Council) at Shilton Lane (rear of The Boat Inn – 100 dwellings), Land at Grange Farm, Longford (100 dwellings) and Land at Banner Park, Wickman's Drive (100 dwellings as part of a mixed use scheme).
 8. The inclusion of the proposed "omission" site within the Green Belt at Chestnut Nurseries, Browns Lane (65 dwellings) as a reserved site to meet future need should it arise.

9. The small Green Belt site at Park Hill Lane, adjacent to the A45 was put forward as another "omission" Site. The Inspector has subsequently recommended it be removed from the Green Belt.
 10. The proposed "omission" site at Land North of Eastern Green was recommended to be retained within the Green Belt.
 11. The proposed "omission" sites south of Duggins Lane (put forward by the Samuel Smiths Charity) and Land North of Duggins Lane (put forward by William Davis) have been recommended to be retained within the Green Belt.
- 3.14 These changes would result in small changes to the figures, but result in a total net capacity within the urban area of 22,600 of which 19,000 approximately is on previously-developed land or already has approval, and a total capacity within Coventry's administrative area of 26,500.

Phasing

- 3.15 The Inspector has strongly supported the Council's approach to the phasing of the identified housing supply. This included a recommendation that the "Council will impose no phasing policy restraint on suitable development sites within the City including the Regeneration Areas, Strategic Urban Allocations (which include some Greenfield sites) or the Strategic Mixed Use Allocations". In terms of Green Belt sites the Inspector has then recommended that the "smaller reserved sites be released first" as part of "List 1" as this would help avoid "the need to commence development of larger Green Belt sites until truly required". The sites at Keresley and the Cross Boundary provision would then form "List 2".

Other Specific Issues

- 3.16 The Inspector has accepted the Council's proposed approach to affordable housing (25% on sites of 15 or more dwellings) and executive homes (10% on sites of 50 or more dwellings). However there is the provision for sites to be considered in terms of viability, which the Inspector has considered important given the current economic climate.
- 3.17 The Inspector has also recommended the inclusion of a housing trajectory within an Appendix to the Core Strategy, which is to be updated annually through the AMR. The recommendation is for the trajectory to be based on the RSS Panel Report Addendum of November 2009. However with the proposed abolition of the RS, a new trajectory based on meeting local needs will require developing.
- 3.18 The Inspector has largely supported the Council's proposed policies on density, Gypsy and Traveller sites and Student accommodation. The main exception is part 2 of the Student housing policy (SG13) where the inspector has recommended a rewording of part 2 of the policy to tighten restrictions as to where new purpose-built student housing should be developed. This can be found on page 42 of the Inspector's report.

Green Belt and Cross Border Housing

- 3.19 The Inspector made a number of comments relating to the Green Belt and the potential for Cross Border developments and these are referred to later in this report where relevant.

Omission Sites

- 3.20 As part of the hearing process the Inspector requested the Council undertake further consultation and give further consideration to a number of sites put forward by others as part of the Core Strategy development. These were referred to as "omission" sites and comprised 10 parcels of land, which were a mix of previously-developed land, Greenfield and Green Belt.

Neighbourhoods

- 3.21 The Inspector's consideration of Policies SC1 and SC4 have been broken down into 3 specific areas. These are as follows:

Policies SC1 and SC2, with a specific focus on retail provision outside of the City Centre.

- 3.22 With the exception of a few minor changes to wording the Inspector was of the view that this policy area was sound. The Inspector considered the "urgent need for significant City Centre re-development" and that any further retail growth outside of the City Centre "should be able to demonstrate that it would complement, rather than compete with the City Centre". The Inspector was also of the view that policies SC1 and SC2 were consistent with PPS4.

Provision of community facilities.

- 3.23 The Inspector was largely supportive of Policy SC3 and its supporting text, however he did recommend a number of small wording changes in order to make the policy sound. These small changes are outlined on Page 56 of the Inspector's report, with the most significant requiring the consideration of economic viability when considering the loss of community facilities.

The removal of Green Belt designations at NDC and around a number of identified schools.

- 3.24 The Inspector considered that as the NDC proposals already had planning consent and that there were no objections to the removal of the Green Belt designation in this area that in this case "exceptional circumstances had been shown to exist".
- 3.25 In relation to schools, the issue was considered under the Environment Section, and recommendations are made accordingly.

Delivery, Flexibility, Monitoring & Implementation [Policy IM1]

- 3.26 The Inspector was happy that the implementation plan, as amended by insertion of cost estimates that were not available at the time of publication, was sound. He also made some minor wording changes, and amended four targets.

Keresley

- 3.27 The Inspector found that a comprehensive scheme, including substantial green infrastructure, was essential to the successful delivery of sustainable development in this area, but that it should be brought forward after previously-developed land and smaller Greenfield/Green Belt sites had been utilised. To this end, he suggested that an Area Action Plan be prepared, given the site is in list 2 of the reserved land (as amended by the Inspector). The Inspector concluded, however, that the 'maximum development parcels' put forward by the Council were unduly prescriptive, instead opting to identify the entire

area north of Sandpits Lane between Tamworth Road and Bennetts Road, up to the city boundary, as well as land between Bennetts Road, Penny Park Lane and Prologis Park as reserved land for future development. In most other aspects, the Inspector found the section of the Core Strategy that relates to Keresley to be generally satisfactory.

Other Green Belt Sites

3.28 These are Green Belt sites that the Council had put forward as 'reserved land' for future development. They comprise:

- Land at Cromwell Lane (west of Cromwell Lane and south of the railway line);
- Land at Lentons Lane (subsequently removed by the Council);
- Land at Hawkesbury / Sutton Stop (east of Grange Road / Blackhorse Road and south east of Sutton Stop and the canal);
- Land at Gibbet Hill (south of Gibbet Hill Road); and
- Land at Duggins Lane (west of Station Road and north of the railway line)

3.29 In addition, the Council proposed to amend the Green Belt boundary along the rear of housing plots to the west of Cromwell Lane.

3.30 The Inspector found that the land to the west of Cromwell Lane (with the exception of the rear gardens of existing properties) should remain in the Green Belt and not be 'reserved' for future development. He also found against the removal of the Lentons Lane site from the Green Belt. In addition, the Inspector recommends that the rear gardens of existing properties on the west side of Cromwell Lane should be removed from the Green Belt.

3.31 The report also found that the "rough pasture land" at Gibbet Hill, being surrounded by houses on three sides, "would help create a clearly consistent and logical western boundary to built development in the locality ... that would be readily defensible against further development pressures in the long term". With respect to the sites at Hawkesbury/Sutton Stop and Duggins Lane, the Inspector recommends their removal from the Green Belt, to be 'reserved' for future development (as list 1 sites, see paragraph 3.16). It should be borne in mind that, in addition to the site at Duggins Lane, an 'omission site' immediately to the north of the 'reserve site' is recommended by the Inspector to be reserved for future development. However, again these sites are not required to meet Coventry's local needs over the Plan period. In addition, the current uncertainty surrounding the Government's intentions for development within the Green Belt brings the desirability of accepting the recommendations to remove both the Hawkesbury/Sutton Stop and Duggins Lane sites from the Green Belt to be reserved for future development into question.

Transport

3.32 The Inspector's report considers the key strategic issues relating to transportation across the City, with particular focus on Policy AC1. This includes improvements to stretches of, and junction at the M6, A444, A46 and A45, as well as NUCKLE 1 and 2, Park and Ride facilities and enhanced bus networks. The Inspector considers that the policy and supporting text are consistent with national guidance (PPG13) and "do not require any further changes to be sound".

Environment

- 3.33 The Inspector's report considers a number of issues relating to general Green Belt, Green Wedges, open space, biodiversity and Green Infrastructure.
- 3.34 The majority of the Inspector's recommendations relate to text changes and see a number of paragraphs deleted including 7.34 -7.36 and 7.52 as they are considered overly prescriptive and only represent "general background information". These changes are made in relation to open space, biodiversity and green infrastructure and are detailed on Pages 88-90 of the Inspector's Report.
- 3.35 The other key recommendation made by the Inspector relates to the proposed inclusion of additional land within the Green Belt in Policy EQ2. This includes green corridors in the Potters Green, Eastern Green and Keresley areas. The Inspector considers that "as these were not designated originally as meeting the purposes of including land within the Green Belt" they can not be introduced now "as a replacement or compensation for land to be removed". Consequently he recommends that the references to these new Green Wedges are to be removed from Policy EQ2. These additional proposed Green Belt areas were identified in part to compensate for other sites being taken out of the Green Belt.
- 3.36 Within this section the Inspector also supports the Core Strategy proposals to remove land from the Green Belt/Green Wedge designation to support the delivery of a new Energy from Waste Plant at London Road, but for no other use, as well as removing a number of schools from the Green Belt.

Energy, Flooding, Water

- 3.37 The Inspector recommends strengthening Policy SG2 (Sustainability), notably with respect to mitigating against flood risk, but removes the requirement for developments of 50 homes to explore the use of community heat and power, and for all developments to be carbon neutral in terms of eliminating carbon emissions (both regulated and unregulated). The report accepts the argument put across during the hearings that the threshold for each of these at 50 dwellings and 10 homes/1000 sqm respectively were set too low and are not justified by available evidence. With respect to the requirement to explore the use of community heat and power systems it is recommended that clear guidance is produced, in order to ensure that take-up of community heat and power systems is actively encouraged in developments of above 100 units. Guidance is also required on the interpretation and application of the remaining elements of SG2, for instance through the publication of appropriate supplementary planning documents.

Minerals and Waste

- 3.38 The key issue in this section is that of the proposed replacement Energy from Waste (EfW) facility at Bar Road. The Inspector accepted the case put forward that, following a rigorous process of site selection, it is necessary to remove the preferred location from the Green Belt and specifically allocate the land for a replacement EfW only. This is to be offset by the site of the current facility being brought into use as public open space within two years of operation of a new plant.

Key Diagram / Proposals Map

- 3.39 The Inspector accepted the Council's argument that it is unnecessary and undesirable to show directions of future growth (into neighbouring authority areas) on the Key Diagram, because this would be prejudicial to neighbouring authorities' own Core Strategies. He also accepted the Council's proposed changes to both the Key Diagram and Proposals

Map. Finally, the report recommends changing the Key Diagram and Proposals Map in accordance with all of his recommendations contained within the report.

General 'Soundness' and Minor Changes

3.40 The Inspector concludes that the Plan is 'sound'. He also proposes a number of minor changes in addition to those put forward by the Council.

4. Proposal and Other Option(s) to be Considered

4.1 In conclusion:

4.2 The Coventry Core Strategy was prepared within the framework of the (soon to be abolished) Regional Strategy. Currently, the legislative changes required to facilitate the abolition have not been enacted. Similarly, legislation regarding the procedures for Core Strategy preparation has also not been amended. In the light of this situation, there is a certain degree of lack of clarity regarding how the Council should move forward. Consequently, in the interim, it is recommended that formal work related to the Core Strategy is put in abeyance.

4.3 It is understood that the Government will make a formal statement regarding the timetable for changes to the legal procedures relating to Core Strategies shortly. Once this clarification is provided, officers will report back on the options available to the City Council with respect to the provision of a statutory development plan for the city.

5. Other specific implications

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Best Value		√
Children and Young People	√	
Climate Change & Sustainable Development	√	
Comparable Benchmark Data		√
Corporate Parenting		√
Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy		√
Crime and Disorder		√
Equal Opportunities		√
Finance		√
Health and Safety		√
Human Resources		√
Human Rights Act		√
Impact on Partner Organisations		√

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Information and Communications Technology		√
Legal Implications	√	
Neighbourhood Management		√
Property Implications	√	
Race Equality Scheme		√
Risk Management		√
Trade Union Consultation		√
Voluntary Sector – The Coventry Compact		√

Children & Young People Implications

- 5.1 The Inspector's report endorses Green Belt re-alignment to enable the redevelopment of schools.

Climate Change & Sustainable Development Implications

- 5.2 The Inspector's report recommends changes to the policy relating to on-site 'sustainability' measures, including removal of the requirement for all developments to be carbon neutral in terms of eliminating carbon emissions (both regulated and unregulated), but tightening up the policy relating to sustainable drainage (SuDS).

Legal Implications

- 5.3 In accordance with current legislation (Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, Section 23(3)), the Inspector's report is binding on the Council. However as outlined above, it is expected that this position will change in the near future.

Property Implications

- 5.4 The City Council owns Greenfield sites and Green Belt sites in the Core Strategy that the Inspector recommends be allocated / reserved for development. It follows that capital receipts from the disposal of these sites for development to support the Council's funding requirement for corporate capital priorities would be generated from the adoption of this policy. A separate review of the impact of this on the Council's holdings will be prepared and presented to the Cabinet Member (City Development).

6. Monitoring

- 6.1 The Annual Monitoring Report will continue to be used to monitor development within the city.

7. Timescale and expected outcomes

- 7.1 Subject to clarification as a result of recent announcements by the Secretary of State.

	Yes	No
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Key Decision	√	
Scrutiny Consideration (if yes, which Scrutiny meeting and date)		
Council Consideration (if yes, date of Council meeting)	√ 6 th July 2006	

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

Location