

**CITY OF SUNDERLAND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: CORE STRATEGY
REVISED PREFERRED OPTIONS**

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's recommendation to Council to approve the Sunderland Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options for public consultation.

2.0 Description of Decision

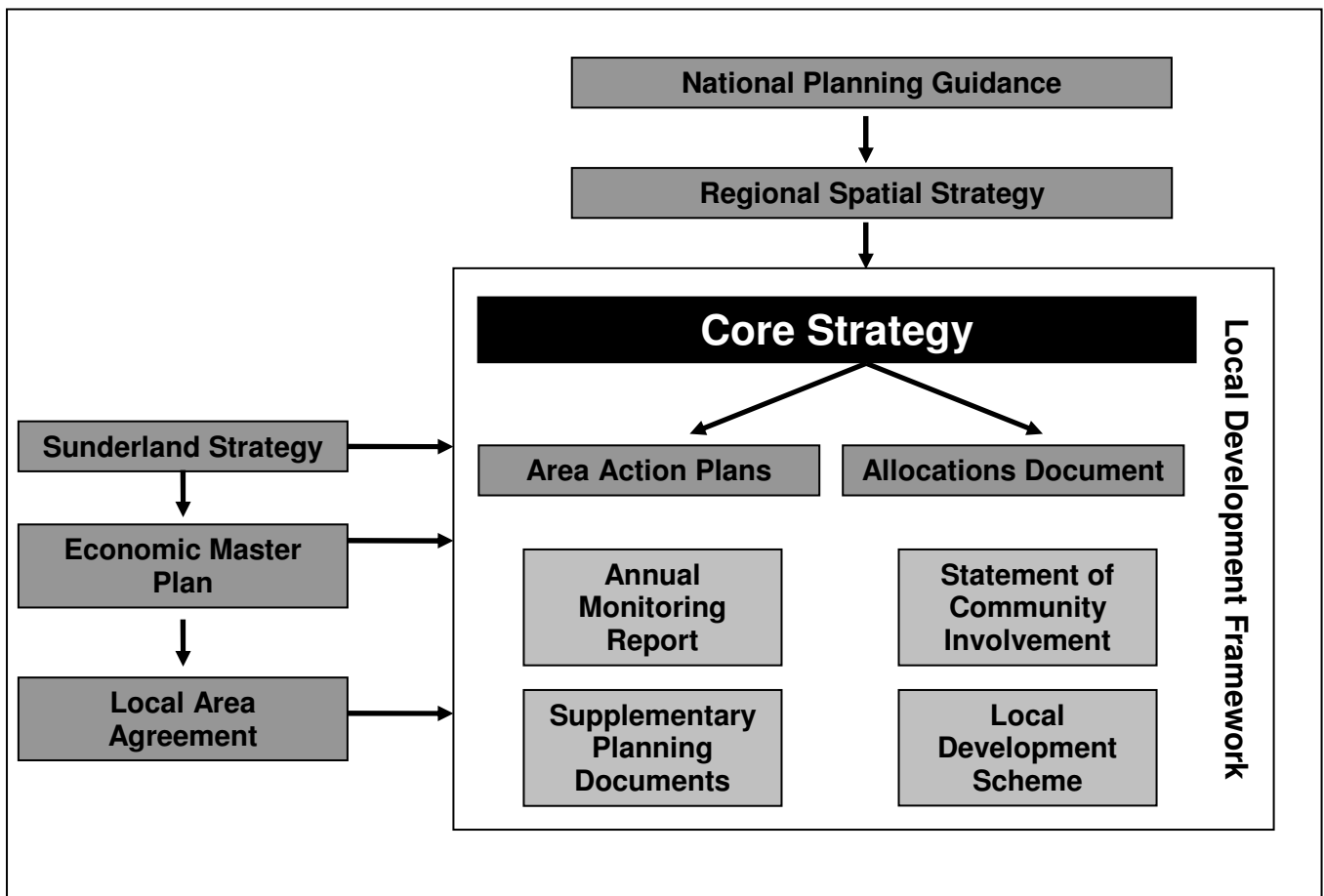
2.1 Cabinet is requested to agree that Council be recommended to:

- i) Note the representations received to the Core Strategy Alternative Options Consultation and agree the Officer recommendations to each response as set out in Annex 1;
- ii) Approve the attached Sunderland Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options (including the Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment reports) for the purposes of public consultation and as a material consideration in assessing planning applications, pending its finalisation following public consultation;
- iii) Authorise the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Prosperous City, to make any required amendments to the attached Sunderland Core Strategy Preferred Options (including the Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment reports) as necessary prior to its publication for public consultation.

3.0 Background ~ The Role and Purpose of the Core Strategy

3.1 The Core Strategy will sit at the heart of Sunderland's Local Development Framework. It will provide the broad strategic spatial policies including the distribution of new housing, retailing and employment across the city until 2026. As Figure 1 illustrates, the Core Strategy must be in general conformity with national planning policy and the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). At the city level, the Core Strategy will also be the main delivery mechanism of those spatial objectives set out in both the Sunderland Strategy and the emerging Economic Masterplan. All lower level documents that will make up the City's LDF (including the Allocations Development Plan Document and Hetton Downs Area Action Plan) must conform to the broad requirements of the Core Strategy.

Figure 1 : Relationship of the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework to Other Plans and Strategies



3.2 Taking its lead from the Sunderland Strategy and Economic Masterplan, the Core Strategy has developed the following overarching spatial vision which is for Sunderland to be:

“An internationally recognised and welcoming city that provides a sustainable distribution of land uses.

To create a place which offers a great quality of life with an enhanced, entrepreneurial and progressive low carbon economy.

The commitment to the environment goes hand in hand with creating a balanced, fulfilling and better future for all with access to first class services, facilities and opportunities for everyone.

In the long term the aim is to develop a city where all residents have a realistic opportunity to access the main centres for employment, shopping and leisure without needing to use a car.”

4.0 Statutory Requirements to Deliver the Core Strategy

4.1 The Core Strategy must proceed through the following statutory stages as set out in the adopted Local Development Scheme (the LDF project plan)

- Issues and Options (consultation completed between November 2005 and February 2006);

- Preferred Options Draft (consultation completed between December 2007 and February 2008);
- Publication Draft including public consultation (programmed for October 2010);
- Submission Draft to the Secretary of State (programmed for February 2011);
- Public Examination before an independent Inspector (programmed for May 2011);
- Adoption (programmed for November 2011).

4.2 At the Public Examination, the Inspector will test the plan for its 'soundness'. The test will include whether : -

- It is based on robust and credible evidence (comprising evidence that the views of the local community and key stakeholders have been sought) and whether the policies are backed up by fact;
- The policies and proposals are deliverable;
- The strategy proposed is the most appropriate having discounted all reasonable alternatives. In effect, this requires a clear evidence trail to demonstrate that through public consultation at the earlier stages of the process, that is up to the Preferred Options stage, all issues and alternative strategies have had an appropriate airing and have been assessed. As the Core Strategy now advances to the next stages, there is limited opportunity to introduce new proposals.

4.3 Failure to meet these tests could result in the Plan being struck down. This would have been the case with Newcastle City Council's Core Strategy, had the Inspector not intervened prior to the start of the Examination and recommended that it be formally withdrawn.

5.0 The Emerging Core Strategy - Progress to Date

5.1 As set out at paragraph 4.1, the first formal stage of preparing the Core Strategy began with the publication for consultation and community engagement of the Issues and Options for the City between November 2005 to February 2006. The formal Core Strategy Preferred Options Draft was published for public consultation between December 2007 and February 2008. A report of this consultation and the agreed way of dealing with each representation was agreed by Council in June 2008.

5.2 However, since the Preferred Options draft was published, a number of changes have taken place : -

- The revised Sunderland Strategy was adopted in April 2008 (though it should be noted there was considerable joint working during the preparatory stages of both documents including conjoined public consultation);
- The Regional Spatial Strategy for the North East (to 2021) (the RSS) was adopted in July 2008 confirming amongst other things the requirement for Sunderland to provide some 225 hectares of employment land and as a minimum some 15,000 net new homes;
- The Planning Act 2008 introduced amendments to the stages that the Core Strategy must pass and in addition now enables core strategies to allocate sites considered to be strategically important. This was followed by a revision of Planning Policy Statement 12 "Local Spatial Planning" which advises that "*Core strategies may allocate strategic sites for development...[that is]...Those sites*

considered central to achievement of the strategy and where investment requires a long lead-in”;

- New evidence of a significant nature has been completed including assessments of future housing needs (by house type, tenure and location), future housing land availability, a review of all employment land and an assessment of future retailing needs;
- The Council commenced work on the Economic Masterplan, which has a fundamental interrelationship to the Core Strategy.

5.3 Given the above information and the need for transparency that all options have been fully considered, it was appropriate to revise the Core Strategy Preferred Options draft prior to advancing to its next formal stage, the Publication Draft. The Local Development Scheme was formally revised in March 2009 to allow for further consultation on the alternative approaches to the overall distribution of development across the city and to test proposals to include ten strategic sites (as set out below).

6.0 The Core Strategy Alternative Approaches and Strategic Sites Consultation (September to November 2009)

The Alternative Approaches

6.1 Four realistic alternative approaches were developed, which were all underpinned by the following principles :-

- Conformity to national and regional policy, the Sunderland Strategy and to the emerging Economic Masterplan;
- Giving primacy to the role of Central Sunderland and the City Centre;
- Supporting regeneration of deprived areas.

6.2 The city was divided into four sub-areas Sunderland North, Sunderland South, Washington and Coalfield. The alternative approaches consulted upon were based around the following different development scenarios :-

- **Approach A ~ Focussing Development on the Conurbation** - growth of the City Centre / Central Sunderland, with further focus on Washington and the main built – up area of Sunderland only. The sustainable growth of Houghton and Hetton and the wider Coalfields would be accommodated;
- **Approach B ~ Proportional Distribution of Development** - a balanced proportion of development (broadly reflecting population levels and land availability) across the four sub areas;
- **Approach C ~ Focus Development within the Current Urban Area** - concentrating development within the existing urban area and on suitable previously developed (brownfield) land, retaining open space and countryside;
- **Approach D ~ Meeting Sub-Area Spatial Requirements - a Hybrid of Approaches A-C**, but also considering the local sub-area needs, priorities, opportunities and constraints.

6.3 Each “Approach” has different implications for the distribution of the RSS housing and employment requirements across the city. Accordingly, a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses accompanied each approach, and more importantly, a detailed Sustainability Appraisal of each approach was undertaken to test their relative sustainability merits. Consultees were requested to rank their preferred “Approaches” on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being the most preferred). An opportunity was also given to provide supporting information to the preferred approach or to suggest other approaches that may not have been considered.

The Strategic Sites

6.4 Ten strategic sites were also identified and proposed for consultation. These were as follows:-

- North of Nissan: to accommodate a range of large scale employment uses;
- Groves: to create a new residential community, with a new local centre, community and business uses;
- Farringdon Row: to complement development at the Vaux site, bringing offices and housing to the City Centre;
- Stadium Village: providing a focus of leisure led regeneration;
- Vaux: to be the key location for new offices along with new homes;
- Holmeside: to provide for a retail led regeneration;
- The Port: to provide for port-related developments and employment uses;
- South Ryhope: as an adopted allocation within the Unitary Development Plan the site would be developed as a business park for a range of employment uses;
- Sunderland Strategic Transport Corridor (SSTC);
- The Central Route.

6.5 An extensive consultation exercise was held between 15th September and 6th November 2009, including :-

- The production of a summary brochure and freepost response slip;
- A staffed mobile exhibition toured the city during the day and evenings;
- A key stakeholder workshop was held which 33 organisations attended from an invitation list of some 100;
- Some 400 letters were sent to statutory consultees and those individuals / organisations on the LDF mailing list and neighbouring properties to the strategic site north of Nissan and South Ryhope;
- All City Council staff were directly notified;
- Exhibition boards were displayed at various key locations around the City;
- A media release was published in the Sunderland Echo;
- Presentations and discussions were undertaken with each of the five Area Committees, the Youth Parliament and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Delivery Improvement Board and Strategic Boards;
- Use of the council's internet site with an on-line response form;
- Details were posted on the Planning Policy Facebook and Twitter pages.

6.6 In all, some 150 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation exercise. A detailed schedule together with the officer recommendations in response to each comment is available from Members' Services. A summary of the key issues raised is as follows: -

- Support for retaining the broad extent of the Green Belt;
- There needs to be a clear definition on the role of the city centre sites for office based employment rather than relying on peripheral employment sites which should be reserved for manufacturing and logistics;
- There should be adequate justification for the inclusion of Strategic Sites in terms of ensuring a robust and sound Core Strategy;
- All approaches need to be focussed on the ability to deliver;
- Concerns were raised over limiting development in the Coalfield area where in some instances, additional growth is sought;
- There is too much emphasis on the role of Sunderland South to deliver new housing;

- There was broad agreement to the range of strategic sites proposed, though some objections were received particularly to the North of Nissan and South Ryhope sites.

6.7 In terms of the Alternative Approaches, a ranking system has shown that Approach D (scoring 269.5) was the most favoured by respondents followed by Approach C (304), then Approach A (318.5) and then Approach B (319). It should also be noted that the Sustainability Appraisal that was completed for this exercise also demonstrated that Approach D was the most sustainable option.

7.0 The Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Draft.

7.1 This recent consultation has therefore formed the basis for the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options Draft which is available from Members' Services.

7.2 The format of the Revised Preferred Options Draft is markedly different from the December 2007 version which contained 20 topic based policies relating to, amongst other things, separate policies dealing with housing, design, employment, bio-diversity, and so on.

7.3 In accordance with Planning Policy Statement 12 "Local Spatial Planning", the theme of shaping Sunderland as a place underlies the format of the Revised Preferred Options Draft. In other words, it seeks to tell the 'story' of where Sunderland has come from and where it will be by 2026 through the delivery of these policies.

7.4 It contains five broad city wide policies that bring together the range of requirements. In summary these relate to :-

- The spatial growth and regeneration of the city and how new development will be distributed;
- Reflecting the RSS by focussing the majority of development in the conurbation of Tyne and Wear whilst supporting the sustainable regeneration and growth of the Coalfields;
- How the council will ensure that development is undertaken in such a way which contributes appropriately to the Core Strategy objectives;
- What will be required of new development in terms of design quality and sustainable construction to ensure that all development is of a high quality, is sympathetic with its surroundings whilst minimising the risk from climate change;
- How the council will manage both waste and minerals in line with the requirements of the RSS.

7.5 The strategic policies are illustrated on a key diagram that shows their geographical relationship.

7.6 The document is rounded off by setting out proposals for the monitoring and the delivery of each policy.

7.7 Five sub-area based policies for Central Sunderland (and the City Centre), Sunderland North, Sunderland South, Washington and the Coalfields have been developed in line with the City Council's Local Area Plans. For each sub-area, it sets out a locally distinctive vision, the key issues and constraints and the

opportunities for potential growth. The respective policies respond to the distinctive issues of each sub-area, for example identifying particular house types which are required in a given sub-area, as informed by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. These policies look in greater depth at any particular transport proposals affecting the area and identify broad “green corridors” which would contribute to the city’s green infrastructure network.

7.8 A strong correlation to the Sunderland Strategy is retained and those key elements of the emerging Economic Masterplan are included.

7.9 In terms of the overall distribution of development, it is proposed that a hybrid of Approaches D and C is taken forward, as follows : -

	New Housing Net Target to 2026	%	New Employment Allocations (hectares)	%
Central Sunderland	4,828	28	25	23
Sunderland North	1,552	9	0	0
Sunderland South	6,380	37	28	25
Washington	1,035	6	43	39
Coalfield	3,448	20	14	13
Total	17,243	100	110	100

7.10 The above table reflects the City’s net additional housing requirement as set out in RSS (which includes past underperformance). However the RSS requirement of 17,243 net additional new dwellings is based upon a high economic growth scenario but the recent economic downturn has impacted significantly on overall housing delivery across the Region. The effect on Sunderland has been to artificially raise future annual housing targets to a likely unrealistic level with an average of 1,150 net additional dwellings required per year, between now and 2026.

7.11 The Head of Planning and Environment is in discussion with Government Office for the North East and Association of North East Councils to consider more realistic annual targets. This would have the effect of reducing the overall net additional housing requirement for 2026 to 14,450 (an average annual target of 963), which is considered achievable (although still historically high) and more importantly deliverable within the time frame of the plan. This will be a minimum target and any additional requirement for housing land reflecting an even better performance can be dealt with through the Plan, Monitor and Manage process.

7.12 At the time of writing, further guidance from the Planning Advisory Service is expected in mid-February on defining strategic sites which will be used to clarify and support the approach in relation to each of the ten Strategic Sites.

7.13 Accordingly, it is proposed to identify three Strategic Sites, which are considered vital to the regeneration of the City’s economy:-

- Vaux / Farringdon Row – The need to regenerate the city centre is an agreed priority of the Council. A key element in this is the need to “grow” the city centre office market in order to realise the range of city centre offices found in other similar sized cities. The former Vaux Brewery site has been identified as a

Strategic Site where large scale office development (Use Class B1a¹) will be provided as part of a mixed-use proposal along with housing and supporting retail and leisure uses. This is the only site of strategic size in the city centre which provides the opportunity to deliver significant office employment and as such it is vital if the economy of the centre and the wider city is to be realised to its full potential. Similarly, the adjacent Farringdon Row site is capable of accommodating office uses to complement the high density office scheme envisioned at Vaux.

- Holmeside – The development of this site is supported by the Retail Needs Study (2009) which highlights a range of issues that need to be addressed if the city centre is to prosper. A key requirement is the achievement of high-quality comparison retail floorspace. The preferred location for this is the Holmeside Triangle site within the City Centre Retail Core, in a highly accessible location adjacent to the Park Lane Public Transport Interchange. This site provides the opportunity to accommodate a strategic level of modern comparison shopping floorspace along with new convenience food facilities, which are vital if the City Centre is to maintain its vitality and viability.
- Land North of Nissan – By way of background, the then emerging Unitary Development Plan first proposed a strategic employment site to the north of Nissan., but given that both the South Tyneside and Gateshead authorities were proposing similar scale employment developments, it was deemed appropriate to consider the case for releasing a single large scale employment site through the then emerging regional planning framework. This culminated in the RSS's 90 hectare proposal for TyneWear Park in South Tyneside. This was subsequently removed from the final RSS. Introducing this proposed 20 hectare site is now supported by the Employment Land Review (2009), which recommends the need to identify a strategic employment site in the Washington area. In addition, given the Government's recent announcement on the North East's Low Carbon Economic Area which puts Sunderland / Nissan at the geographical heart of this designation., it is considered that this site could provide a suitable location for 3 to 4 large employers associated directly or indirectly with the low carbon technologies and vehicle production.

7.14 With regard to the seven other sites initially identified (at paragraph 6.4), these remain included in policy terms within the Core Strategy, but are not given the same degree of status as the Strategic Sites.

8.0 Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment

8.1 The Revised Preferred Options document is supported by a Sustainability Appraisal report as required by the applicable legislation. The Sustainability Appraisal incorporates a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the plan as required by European Directive. An 'Appropriate Assessment' Report of the potential impact of the plan on Natura 2000 sites (these are international designations covering species and ecological habitats), again a legislative requirement, has also been prepared. Copies of these documents are available from Members' Services.

¹ The Use Classes Order (2005) define business uses (B1) into three sub-categories, B1(a) is offices other than financial and professional services, B1(b) is research and development and B1(c) is light industry.

9.0 Next Steps

- 9.1 Following approval by the Council the Core Strategy, (along with its supplementary reports), will be published, advertised and placed on the Sunderland website for consultation. The consultation will cover the statutory minimum period of 6 weeks during April and May 2010 and will be undertaken entirely in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.
- 9.2 Subsequent to the close of consultation, responses will be collated and a summary of the main issues emerging prepared for the agreement of Cabinet and Council. The Core Strategy will be amended as necessary to take account of the responses to the consultation and other more up to date information.
- 9.3 The subsequent versions of the Core Strategy will be delivered in accordance with the adopted LDS as outlined at paragraph 4.1.

10.0 Relevant Considerations

10.1 Reason for Decision

The decision is required to enable the Core Strategy to proceed to its next stage (statutory consultation) in accordance with the Council's adopted LDS.

Authority is sought for the Deputy Chief Executive to agree final amendments to the documentation prior to their publication. This is to acknowledge ongoing discussions with Government Office for the North East regarding the wording of policies relating to the city's net additional housing requirement, gypsies and travellers, strategic development sites and green infrastructure. These discussions are recognised as best practice. It should be noted that consultants have been commissioned to complete further evidence in relation to the viability of securing affordable housing. This is due to be completed in late March.

10.2 Alternatives

All local planning authorities are charged under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 with the preparation of a local development framework, which must include a core strategy. They are also charged with preparing the LDF in accordance with the provisions of an approved Local Development Scheme. Therefore there are no alternatives to preparing the preferred options of the Core Strategy.

10.3 Financial Implications

Costs have arisen from developing the evidence base and will arise from the consultations and subsequent Public Examination of the Core Strategy, funding of which will be met from contingencies.

10.4 Legal Implications

The Core Strategy, Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment have been prepared in accordance with the applicable legislation.

10.5 Policy Implications

The Revised Preferred Options set out draft over-arching policies for the guidance of development. Until the Core Strategy is adopted the provisions of the saved policies of the Sunderland Unitary Development Plan and Alteration Number 2 will

remain the statutory land use policies for the City along with the Regional Spatial Strategy. However the draft Core Strategy if approved will become a material consideration in considering planning applications to help ensure that planning decisions are up to date and reflect the aspirations of the City as expressed in the Sunderland Strategy and emerging Economic Masterplan.

10.6 Implications for other Services

The Core Strategy policies reflect as appropriate other Council and LSP partners' strategies, plans and programmes. As such it should enable their land use aspirations to be delivered in a co-ordinated and timely manner, for instance the land use aspects associated with the Council's waste management strategy. The consultation period will provide a further opportunity for interested parties to ensure that their strategies and plans have been properly considered and accounted for in the Core Strategy.

10.7 The Public

It is a requirement of the planning system that the public as a whole is engaged in the development plan process, with minimum statutory requirements for consultation set out in Regulations. The consultations so far on the Core Strategy and those proposed for the Revised Preferred Options have and will achieve those requirements for public engagement set out within the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

Background Papers

Statement of Community Involvement (March 2007)

Local Development Scheme (March 2009)

PPS12 "Local Spatial Planning (June 2008)

Core Strategy Issues and Options (November 2005)

Core Strategy Preferred Options (December 2007)

Core Strategy Alternative Approaches (September 2009)

Results of Consultations on the Core Strategy Alternative Approaches (March 2009)

Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options (March 2010)

Sustainability Appraisal to the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options (March 2010)

Appropriate Assessment to the Core Strategy Revised Preferred Options (March 2010)