

Meeting of the Council – 8th October 2012

Report of the Cabinet

Re-Publication of the Stourbridge Area Action Plan

Purpose of Report

1. To inform the Council of progress on the Stourbridge Area Action Plan (AAP) and to seek approval for the AAP to be submitted to the Secretary of State so that it may be subjected to a Public Examination, following a final six week period of public consultation.

Background

2. The preparation of an AAP for Stourbridge is a key activity in delivering a priority of the Council Plan (2013) - improving the vibrancy and attractiveness of the Borough's town centres.
3. Within the adopted Black Country Core Strategy (February 2011), Stourbridge is identified within a network of town centres that form a distinctive and valued part of the Black Country's character. The general aim of the Core Strategy is to shape and revitalise these centres to meet the community's needs in the most accessible and sustainable way. The policies of the Stourbridge AAP seek to carry forward and provide a focus for these strategic planning aims.
4. The AAP will guide new investment into Stourbridge Town Centre up to 2026, including identifying where new shops and homes will be located, along with the transport infrastructure and new public spaces which are needed to help support that growth and benefit the local community and local environment in general.
5. The AAP Publication Stage policies have been shaped by previous rounds of public engagement. This includes the initial evidence gathering, public consultation on 'Issues and Options' (February 2010) and 'Preferred Options' (July 2011) and a previous 'Publication' consultation (March 2012). This consultation has involved Council Members, landowners, town centre traders, developers and key interest groups, and included the display of information at libraries and at events in The Ryemarket, where officers were present to respond to any questions and views offered by members of the community and ward members who attended.

6. Following Cabinet approval for Publication of the AAP in March 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework was published. The AAP has now been revised to take account of the latest Government policy and now needs to be re-issued for 'Publication' stage consultation.
7. This Publication AAP document sets out Dudley Council's finalised set of strategies and policies, some of which are site specific. This final version is to be subject to a further period of consultation prior to submission.
8. The key themes present in the Publication document are:-
 - Public Realm improvements within the town centre core, including the provision of a more attractive, accessible and pedestrian friendly shopping environment;
 - Greater pedestrian accessibility to the Town Centre across the ring road, and measures to soften the visual impact of the ring road;
 - Improvements to the River Stour (the "rediscovery of the river"), including its de-culverting, and the provision of a green open space corridor centred on it, with pathways along the river banks and improvements which focus on enhancements to the area's nature conservation value;
 - Proposals to shape development on a series of Opportunity Sites, with an emphasis on providing for new residential development within the river corridor to the north of the town, while providing measures to ensure that industry there continues to thrive where it remains viable;
 - The uplift of the Stourbridge Wharf area (at Canal Street) with an emphasis on providing space for creative/cultural industry and visitor economy related businesses, including entertainment and leisure uses, as well as upgrading the environment with measures which are sensitive to the area's historic value.
9. The period of consultation on the Publication Stage document begins on the 1st October 2012 and runs for a period of 6 weeks until 12th November 2012. During that time, the document will be able to be viewed at the reception areas at 3 St James's Road Dudley, Mary Stevens Park, Stourbridge and Dudley Council Plus, as well as at all main libraries and on the Council's website. It will also be the subject of other, similar publicity measures to those, which were carried out on previous versions of the plan. The document is also the subject of a Member drop in session specifically tailored for all 72 Council Members. Under the Localism Act 2011 the Council has a new 'duty to cooperate' with its neighbouring Councils and key stakeholders. Various meetings continue to be held to ensure that the Council can meet its obligations in relation to this duty.
10. Following this consultation, it is anticipated that the AAP will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate during early 2013. The submitted plan is then likely to be subject to a formal Examination in Public in summer 2013 and adopted in winter 2013.
11. The Cabinet considered this report at its meeting on 12th September, 2012 and recommended the Council to approve the recommendations below.

Finance

12. The AAP will be funded from existing budgets and resources dedicated to the production of Development Plan Documents and other such statutory planning documents.

Law

13. This AAP is a Development Plan Document (DPD), produced in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2012.
14. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 allows the Council to do anything that it considers is likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of the area.

Equality Impact

15. The AAP will set the detailed planning framework for the development of the Stourbridge area at least up to 2026. The AAP will seek to ensure that sufficient homes, shops and employment, social, educational and recreational facilities are planned and provided for in that time to meet the needs of all the communities in the area.
16. This will include meeting the needs of children and young people by seeking to provide sufficient facilities for them as well as having a positive effect for future generations.

Recommendations

17. It is recommended:-

- That following public consultation, the Stourbridge Area Action Plan be submitted to the Secretary of State so that it may be subjected to a Public Examination.
- That the Director of the Urban Environment, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, be authorised to agree any minor recommended changes to the document prior to submission to the Secretary of State, following consultation which concludes on 12th November, 2012 and that any such changes be notified to all Members of the Council.



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Leader of the Council