

Meeting of the Council – 16th April, 2012

Report of the Cabinet

Stourbridge Area Action Plan (AAP) (publication stage)

Purpose of Report

- 1 To consider the proposals of the Cabinet regarding approval of the Stourbridge Area Action Plan (AAP) Publication Stage document (March 2012) as a basis for public consultation and the subsequent submission of the document to the Secretary of State.

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 and other stakeholder engagement associated with the progression of the former stages of the AAP, the initial evidence gathering, and public consultation on both the Draft 'Issues and Options' (February 2010) and the Draft 'Preferred Options' (July 2011) stages. This consultation has involved 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 who attended.

- 6 This Publication Stage AAP document sets out Dudley Council's finalised set of strategies and policies, based upon the evidence and having regard to the consultation, some of which are site specific. The final version is to be subject to a further period of consultation prior to submission.
- 7 A full copy of the Publication Stage AAP document, together with the associated plans, is available to view in the Members' Room, and is also available on the Council's website (follow the links to Meetings and Decisions).
- 8 The key themes present in the Publications Stage 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 began on 20th March 2012 and will run for a period of 6 weeks until 1st May 2012. During this period, the document may 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. Other publicity measures, similar to those which were carried out on previous versions of the plan, are also being undertaken.
- 10 Following this consultation, a 'finalised Stourbridge AAP' document will be prepared based on the responses received and any further evidence which is gathered. It is anticipated that this report will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate during summer 2012. The submitted plan is then likely to be subject to a formal Examination in Public in winter 2012, with a potential adoption date for the plan in spring 2013.
- 11 In receiving the information above, and noting the progress on the AAP made to date, the Cabinet, at its meeting held on 14th March, 2012, resolved to recommend the Council to approve the proposals set out in paragraph 17 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 2004 as amended by the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008. The Regulations which are relevant to community involvement and representations on DPDs are Regulations 25, 26 and 27 of the 2004 Regulations (as amended).
- 14 In addition, 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 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.

Recommendation

- 17 It is recommended:-
- That the Stourbridge Area Action Plan be approved in order that the document can be published, subjected to consultation and, along with representations received, be submitted to the Secretary of State.
 - 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 changes to the document prior to its submission to the Secretary of State.



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Leader of the Council