

Presentation by Mr D Kearsley (Strategic Planning Team Leader at Wigan Council) on the Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Plan - 28 February 2019

The Strategy

The Spatial Plan was intended for the long-term – nineteen years – and covered employment, jobs, homes, leisure, wildlife and the environment as well as land. Its aim was to deliver inclusive growth, making the most of key locations and assets, and address disparities by boosting northern competitiveness. The Plan provided opportunities for Wigan with respect to economy. At present there were more opportunities in the southern areas of Greater Manchester and the northern boroughs were not as well off.

Housing

The housing stock would need to be increased by 200,000 new homes across Greater Manchester by 2037. The annual target of 21,400 had not changed since the 2016 version of the Plan. However, the number of Green Belt areas allocated to housing had been reduced from ten to four. Land supply for 23,078 homes had been identified in the Wigan area. 60% of this consisted of brownfield sites.

Under the Plan only 22 new homes had been allocated to Shevington. No significant developments were proposed for this area. The Plan placed a requirement on Wigan to permit 1,126 new homes to be built annually, but the LA were planning to increase this number. Other districts were proposing reductions.

Economic Development

Most of Wigan's employment supply was too small, too constrained and poorly located. Confidence had returned after the recession and there was a demand for sites, but there was nothing suitable available.

Proposed site allocations Around the Borough

Land at J25 of the M6 was viewed as a key site for business investment. The area west of Gibfield was another proposed site which would provide 45,500 square metres of employment. A site had been allocated to the north of Mosley Common for 1,200 homes. While apparently an acceptable choice, there were concerns about levels of traffic congestion at the junction with the A580.

Significant development was proposed to the south of Pennington – around the junction of the A579 with the A580. The Green Belt would be maintained to the north of this junction, because this was the location of Pennington Flash.

A site allocated at Pocket Nook in Lowton for 600 new homes would be split in two by HS2. The introduction of the HS2 line would require the demolition of some of the businesses in the area, so this site would also provide alternative accommodation for those businesses.

Green Belt Release

Green Belt release in the Wigan area had been reduced by 61% under the new Plan. 35% of the Green Belt to be released would be used for business and 65% for housing development.

Transport

Town planners were working closely with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) over transport schemes to which there was already a commitment. The A49 link road was currently under construction, but the introduction of a smart motorway at J27 had been delayed. HS2 growth strategy, the expansion of Manchester's rapid transit system for buses and further improvements at J23 of the M6 were all being considered.

Appendix A

The Environment

The following were all being incorporated into the Plan:

- Protection and enhancement of green infrastructure;
- Protection of the Greater Manchester wetlands – mostly in the Wigan area;
- Development to have a net biodiversity;
- Improved access to green infrastructure.

The aim was to be carbon neutral by 2038. There area would have a policy of resisting fracking. This would be challenging, because it was contrary to national policy.

Local Implications

The only reference to Shevington in the Plan involved the allocation of 22 new homes. Additional areas had been proposed for designation as Green Belt and inclusion in the Plan as such. These were areas on either side of the M6 motorway in the vicinity of Crow Orchard Road.

The Planning Department had received numerous requests for sites in the Borough designated as Green Belt to have the designation removed and to be included in the Plan as allocations for development. Applications for Green Belt release had been made with respect to land in Back Lane and between Shevington and Standish. All sites proposed for Green Belt removal had been scored. The sites in this area had been scored as being less suitable than others.

Conclusion

The Consultation would inform a new Draft Plan and there would be a further Consultation in the Summer. It was anticipated that the Plan would be adopted in 2020.

The meeting was then opened out to questions from councillors and members of the public present. Observations were made about the need for co-operation with neighbouring authorities over cross-boundary issues. Mr Kearsley reported that Wigan Council had submitted a holding objection to West Lancashire Borough Council's proposals in their Local Plan with respect to land allocations for development along the routes between J27 of the M6 and nearby villages.

Once the Plan had been adopted it would supersede all Local Plans within Greater Manchester. The associated difficulties and vulnerabilities of the Plan were explained by Mr Kearsley.

In answer to concerns expressed about the demise of local town centres, Mr Kearsley advised that the Plan included the provision of shopping as well as homes. With regard to town centres: Town Planners were considering providing a wider offer than just retail and leisure.