
Report to: Planning Committee

Date of Meeting: 12 June 2013

Subject: West Lancashire District Council Local Plan - Inspector's Proposed Modifications and the potential Implications for Sefton

Report of: Jane Gowing

Wards Affected: All

Is this a Key Decision? No

Is it included in the Forward Plan?
No

Exempt/Confidential

No

Purpose/Summary

To advise Members of the Inspector's interim views on the modifications needed to the West Lancashire Local Plan, insofar as they may have implications for Sefton.

Recommendation(s)

That Planning Committee:

(i) note Inspector's interim views on the modifications needed to the West Lancashire Local Plan, insofar as they may have implications for Sefton; and

(ii) agree an appropriate response to West Lancashire Borough Council regarding the two safeguarded housing sites at Halsall.

How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Objectives?

	<u>Corporate Objective</u>	<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1	Creating a Learning Community		√	
2	Jobs and Prosperity		√	
3	Environmental Sustainability		√	
4	Health and Well-Being		√	
5	Children and Young People		√	
6	Creating Safe Communities		√	
7	Creating Inclusive Communities		√	
8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local Democracy		√	

Reasons for the Recommendation:

To enable a Members to respond to the Inspector’s interim views on the modifications proposed to the West Lancashire Local Plan, insofar as they have implications for Sefton.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

None.

(B) Capital Costs

None.

Implications:

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

Legal		
None		
Human Resources		
None		
Equality		
1.	No Equality Implication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.	Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input type="checkbox"/>

Impact on Service Delivery:

None

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

The Head of Corporate Finance (FD2329) and has been consulted and notes the report does not indicate any direct financial implications. However the report states there is clearly a member concern over the early release of the two Halsall sites as they will potentially impact on Sefton’s and in particular Southport’s, infrastructure/school requirements etc. **Financial implications arising from any such decision will be reported at a future meeting.**

Head of Corporate Legal Services (LD1644) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

Are there any other options available for consideration?

No

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Planning Committee meeting.

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Background Papers:

Inspector's letter setting out his interim views on proposed modifications to the West Lancashire Local Plan, 15th May 2013

Letter from West Lancashire Borough Council, May 2013

1. Introduction / Background

- 1.1 Members may recall that they were consulted on the publication draft of the West Lancashire Local Plan on 11th February 2012. Accordingly, the resolution [Minute 142] was as follows:

142. WEST LANCASHIRE LOCAL PLAN 'PREFERRED OPTIONS'

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Service, which sought the views on West Lancashire District Council's (WLDC) Preferred Options document.

The Committee broadly supported the WLDC Preferred Options document and in connection with the four sites referred to raised the following concerns: the use of agricultural land; the development of the allotments; and the additional pressure on Sefton Council's services such as schools. The Committee also expressed their concern regarding the extent of WLDC's consultation undertaken not being adequate. The Committee requested that Officers prepare a response that covered these issues.

Mr.I.Gill, an Officer from WLDC, provided a verbal response to some of the points raised by Members.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the report be noted; and

(2) the Committee approved the recommendation that Sefton Council broadly supported West Lancashire Borough Council's Preferred Options document and that the detailed views expressed above regarding the four sites be referred to in the Council's formal response to WLDC's consultation

- 1.2 The above views were conveyed to West Lancashire Borough Council as comprising the Council's formal response to the consultation.
- 1.3 Since this time an examination into West Lancashire's submitted Local Plan took place over nine days from 19th February until 7th March 2013 and the Inspector has now set out, in a letter dated 15th May 2013, his interim views on the local plan policies. [This letter can be inspected on the West Lancashire Council's website - see link below]. These, where they are of relevance to Sefton, are addressed in the next section of the report.

http://www.westlancs.gov.uk/planning/planning_policy/the_local_plan/the_local_plan_2012-2027/local_plan_preparation_stages/stage_4_-_submission_and_exami.aspx

2. The Inspector's Proposed Modifications to the Submitted West Lancashire Local Plan of Relevance to Sefton

2.1 Broadly speaking, the Inspector seems very supportive of the policies contained in the West Lancashire Local Plan. He does, however, raise seven areas of concern. Two are of particular relevance to Sefton, namely:

- Housing land; and
- Plan B sites and land safeguarded by policy GN2

Each are inter-related and considered below.

Housing land

2.2 In deriving a housing requirement figure for West Lancashire over the plan period to 2027, the Inspector first applies the RSS housing backlog (i.e. 679) and applies it uniformly over the plan period (i.e. 45 dwellings per annum). He then applies the annual household growth figure of 247 per annum derived from the 2011 Based Interim Household Projections and adds an additional allowance of 4% per annum (about 1% above current vacant and second homes) to derive a figure of 257 per annum. This, when added together, gives a total requirement 302 dwellings per annum which he applies for the period 2012 to 2017.

2.3 However, mindful of objections received by NLP on behalf of an objector and the demographic evidence submitted by them in respect of this, the Inspector then increases the requirement by almost 11%, to 335 dwellings per annum, for the period 2017 to 2027. This gives an overall plan period housing requirement of 4,858 dwellings compared to the previously submitted 4,650 dwellings.

2.4 It is important to note that the above process was required by the West Lancashire Local Plan Inspector because West Lancashire Borough Council, unlike Sefton, had not commissioned an up-to-date and specialist assessment of borough housing requirements to inform the Local Plan process.

2.5 Comparing this with West Lancashire's identified housing supply and applying a 5% buffer, the Inspector concludes that there is now a shortfall in housing provision which approximates to a need for a further 210 units (i.e. 4,860 minus 4,650) to be identified in order to make this part of the local plan sound.

Plan B and land safeguarded by policy GN2

2.6 Given the above the Inspector finds that one or more of the Plan B safeguarded sites should be brought forward for development:

"...to meet the identified shortfall in housing delivery with the remainder of the Plan period."

2.7 In this regard the Inspector takes the view that a choice should be made between the safeguarded sites, namely (see para 12 and footnote 7 to the Inspector's letter):

“Parr’s Lane (east) and (west), Aughton and Fine Jane’s Farm and New Cut Lane, Halsall.”

2.8 Accordingly West Lancashire Borough Council has now written to Sefton to advise the Council that they have updated their housing trajectory, and have found some limited additional housing potential elsewhere. They have calculated that their land supply position could improve and this could reduce the housing shortfall by up to 100 dwellings, taking the overall requirement figure to just above 100 dwellings, of which at least 50 dwellings would be required in the period to 31st March 2018.

2.9 As a consequence of the above, West Lancashire Borough Council, in their letter to Sefton, is now proposing the following:

“Therefore, as we prepare our modifications to propose to the Inspector, these two sites [i.e. Fine James Farm and New Cut Lane] feature in some of the likely options we will seriously consider for inclusion in the Local Plan as an additional housing allocation. These options would be:

- To release both of the Fine Jane’s Farm [60 dwellings] and New Cut Lane [70 dwellings] sites that are currently safeguarded in the submitted Local Plan (a total indicative capacity of 130 dwellings);*
- To release the enlarged New Cut Lane site only (a total indicative capacity of 150 dwellings); and*
- To release both the enlarged New Cut Lane site [150 dwellings] and the Fine Jane’s Farm site [60 dwellings] (a total indicative capacity of 210 dwellings).*

The first option above would have the benefit of not requiring any further Green Belt release, whereas the other two would require further Green Belt release because of the enlarged New Cut Lane site (albeit Green Belt that no longer fulfils a purpose of the Green Belt).

The second option would enable the additional housing allocation to be focused on one location only, minimising impact to that one location. The third option would release more land than is strictly necessary for housing allocation, but this would have the benefit of giving a small surplus of housing land supply over the Plan period, which could be beneficial in these difficult economic times.

The purpose of this letter is to, in the spirit of the Duty to Co-operate, seek the views of Sefton MBC on the potential inclusion of these sites in the West Lancashire Local Plan as additional housing allocations. In particular, whether you would have any objection to the inclusion of either site or whether you would favour one particular option above the others.”

2.10 Plans of this site are set out at Appendix A to this report i.e. (1) Fine Janes Farm and (2) New Cut Lane (including proposed extended area).

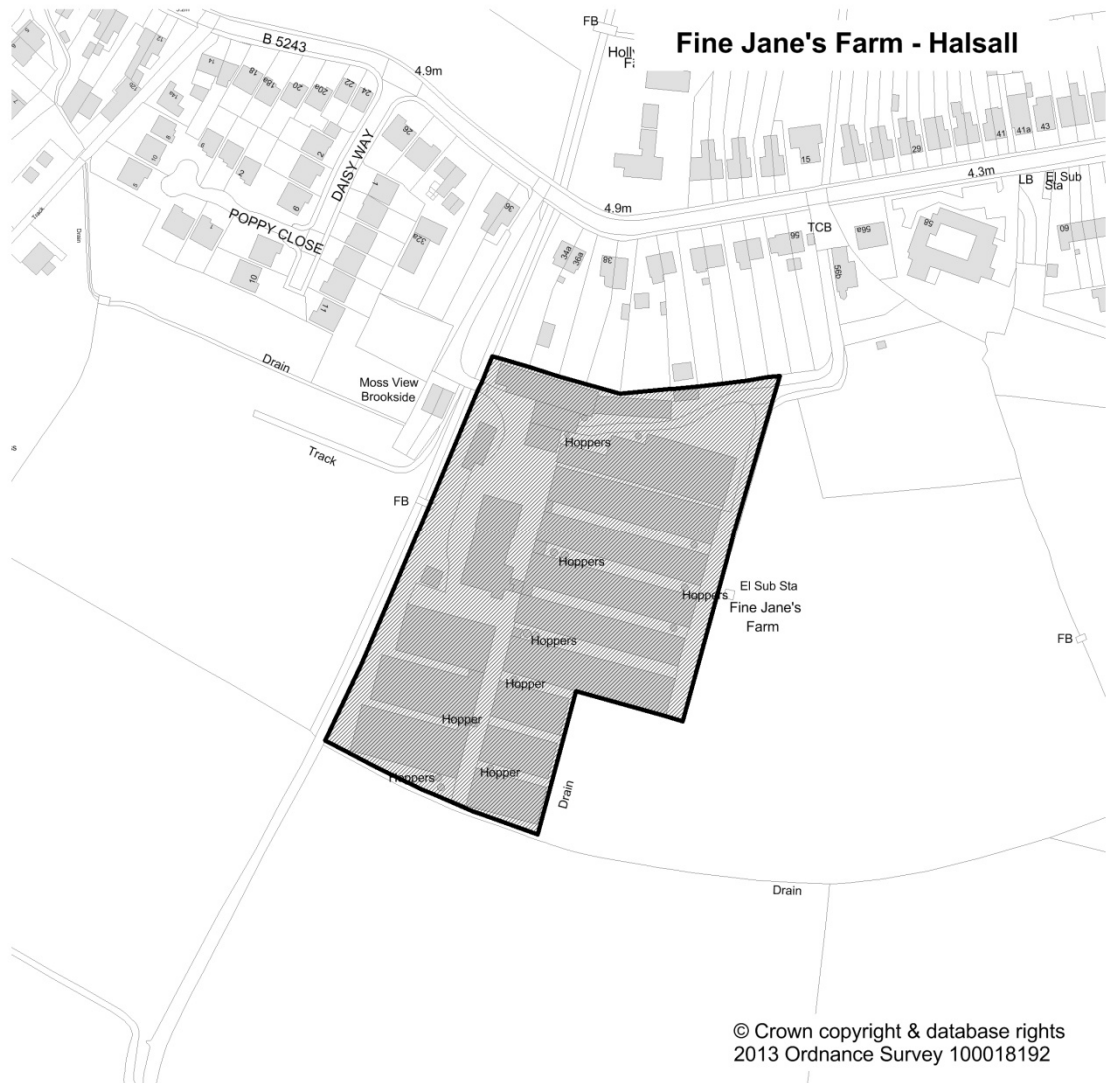
3. Comments of the Head of Planning Services

- 3.1 West Lancashire Borough Council, were initially seeking a response by 31st May but this has not been possible and we have undertaken to respond after the meeting of this committee, allowing Members views to be sought.
- 3.2 Members will recall that they have in the past expressed some concern about the future release of safeguarded site along the boundary with Southport. West Lancashire is now seeking to bring forward one or both of these sites to meet their identified housing land supply shortfall.
- 3.3 As part of this process, West Lancashire Borough Council have confirmed that they have examined their four safeguarded sites and are convinced that the two Halsall sites (i.e. *Fine James Farm and New Cut Lane*) are the most sustainable of the limited realistic options they have available to them. In their view the only other realistic alternative to the Halsall sites are the two Parrs Lane sites (which they consider perform as one site) in Aughton, which has a capacity for about 400 dwellings. However, given this capacity would be much larger than they require and West Lancashire Borough Council consider that they would have a greater environmental impact than the Halsall sites, they believe that best planning outcome would be to release the two Halsall sites for early housing development. West Lancashire Borough Council further emphasis that the capacity of the two sites when taken together is modest, ranging from 130 units to 210 units if the New Cut Lane site were enlarged.
- 3.4 Notwithstanding the above, there is a not unreasonable member concern over the early release of these sites as they will potentially have some impact on Sefton's and, in particular, Southport's, infrastructure/school requirements etc. However, against this there is a risk that West Lancashire might not be able to identify additional land, its Local Plan could be found to be unsound, although a response could be framed on the basis that members oppose the early release of the two Halsall sites and urge West Lancashire Borough Council to release some of the land at Parr's Lane, Aughton as an alternative.
- 3.5 Alternatively, a compromise position may be that members support the release of the two Halsall sites coming forward for housing, either with New Cut Lane expanded or not, but seek the allocation of a realistic proportion (to be agreed) of their dwelling capacity, reflecting the sites close housing market and infrastructural connection with Southport, to be set against Sefton's own local plan housing requirement. Given this, a split between the two authorities would not seem unreasonable. This would have the advantage of satisfying West Lancashire Borough Council' s requirement and would make a modest contribution to meeting Sefton's own local plan housing requirement, thereby reducing any possible green belt land take in Sefton by an equivalent amount if members were to decide to pursue a local plan option which embraces green belt release.
- 3.6 Accordingly the various options can be summarised as follows:
 - (i) to support the two safeguarded sites abutting Sefton come forward for development and meet West Lancashire's unmet housing needs;

- (ii) to object that the two safeguarded sites are brought forward for development and suggest to West Lancashire Borough Council that, as an alternative, they pursue the release of part of the two sites at Parr's Lane, Aughton; or
- (iii) to support the two safeguarded sites abutting Sefton come forward for development, possibly with the New Cut Lane site being enlarged (i.e. from 70 dwellings to 150 dwellings), but only on the basis that any dwellings completions arising from this process are shared with Sefton on an equitable basis.

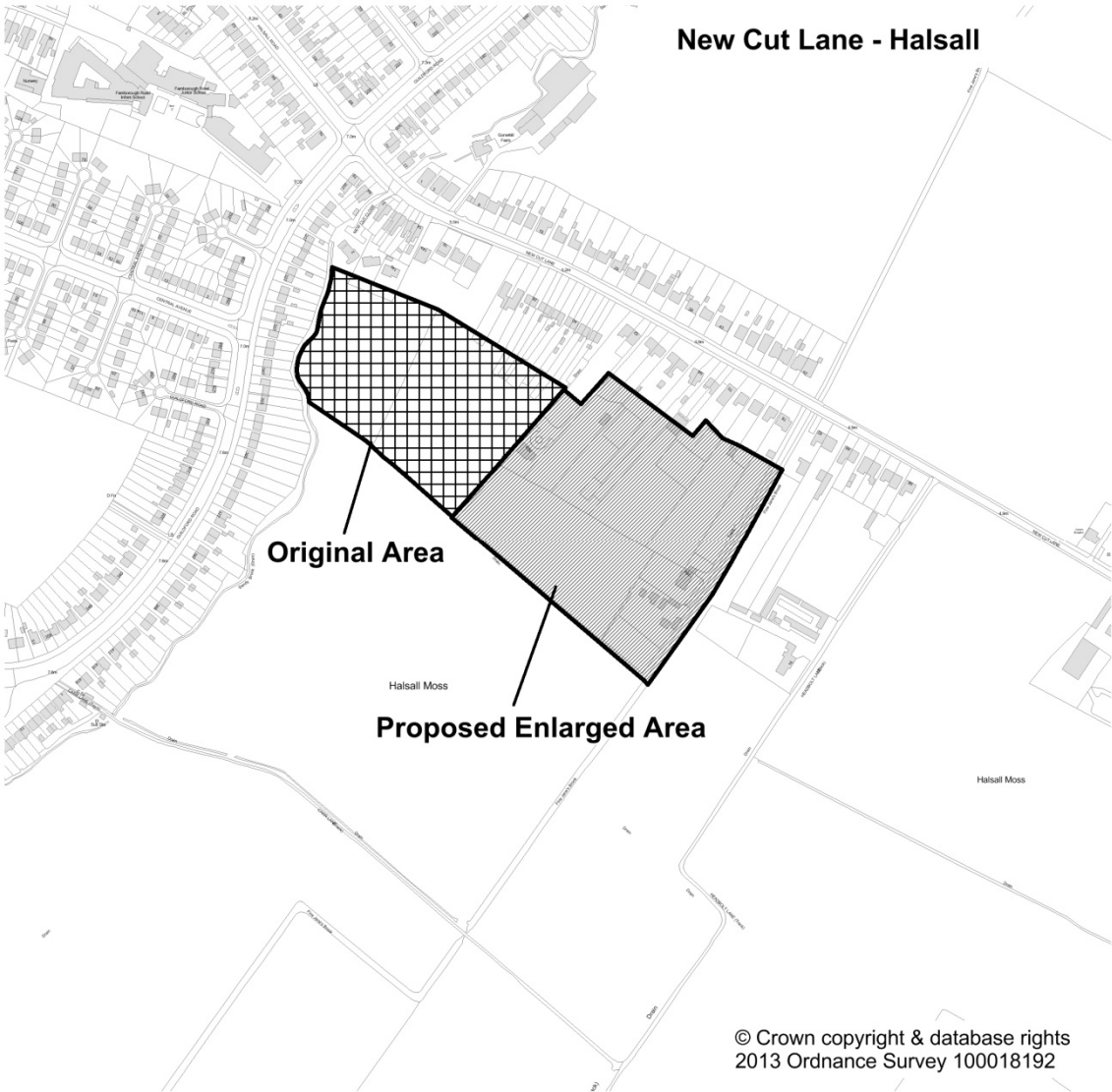
3.7 Notwithstanding the above, the need for positive cross boundary working, consistent with the Duty to Cooperate is of considerable importance to the Planning Inspectorate and, it is important, if possible that we reach an amicable agreement with West Lancashire Borough Council given our close housing market and other ties with them. If we can reach agreement with them and this is accepted by their Inspector, we would be able to cite this as positive example of the Duty to Co-operate as our own local plan progresses. In this context, it should be noted that the potential release of land for some 130 (or 210) dwellings on the boundary with Sefton would not normally be regarded as a significant scale of development by the Planning Inspectorate.

Appendix A



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New Cut Lane - Halsall



Original Area

Halsall Moss

Proposed Enlarged Area

Halsall Moss