

## **Core Strategy - Why we are where we are**

If only we could write a planning Core Strategy, publish it and adopt it, something would have been in place long ago. Sadly, life is not that simple.

We are required to follow tight Government rules. Critics cannot blame the local administration for delays that are outside their control. There is a risk of much further delay should the process be compromised, leaving the District too vulnerable.

We are seeking legal advice, following the publication on 25<sup>th</sup> October of the Secretary of State's decision on development at Shottery, which could have policy implications.

We are not yet ready to update our Core Strategy timetable and an explanation of the current situation is given below.

When we can be clear, a new timetable will be published with the aim of adopting a robust Core Strategy. I will not produce plans that lack integrity.

### ***Core Strategies***

The Core Strategy is part of a framework whereupon planning applications are judged. It is a legal document that must be sound and robust and compliant with National and Regional policies. Drafts are to published that require consultation, stakeholder workshops and consequent revisions. They require an evidence base, are subject to environmental impact assessments and sustainability appraisals as well as an Examination in Public conducted by a planning inspector. This is a costly and time consuming process. Significantly, when National Policy changes, the Core Strategy needs a review.

### ***History***

Once upon a time all District Planning authorities had a Local Plan.

Stratford-on-Avon District Council had a Local Plan 1996-2011, adopted in the year 2000.

When Warwickshire County Council subsequently adopted the sister Warwickshire Structure Plan 1996-2011, there was a need to revise the Local Plan to ensure compliance and revisions were adopted in July 2006.

By 2004, the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) had become part of the planning policy framework and the local plan review took account of the need to ensure additional compliance. The spatial strategies were prepared regionally but adopted as National Planning Policy in individual regions.

### ***Changes***

The Government of the noughties decided that Local Plans took too long to overcome national bureaucracy, legal hurdles and challenges to becoming adoptable.

New rules split the Local Plans into component parts called development plan documents (DPDs). The DPD dealing with local planning strategies is called the Core Strategy. In preparing a Core Strategy, the Stratford-on-Avon Local Plan 1996-2011 would expire in 2009, setting a target for the adoption of a Core Strategy.

### *More Changes*

Those councils that tried to produce a Core Strategy quickly suffered problems. The Government introduced new time consuming processes to deal with this situation that effectively added costs and put everybody's Core Strategy Development on hold while evidence was gathered and documents were scrutinised. However, this ensured that Plans became accurately evidence based.

As the original targets could no longer be met, most policies in the Local Plan 1996-2011 were saved in 2009 to provide ongoing local policy upon which to base planning applications.

The new government elected in 2010 has maintained all the bureaucratic machinery introduced by its predecessor.

In 2011 it consulted on new government planning policy at a time when it was admitted that 70% of Local Planning Authorities had not been able to adopt their Core Strategy.

### *Our Core Strategy*

Our draft core Strategy has evolved in parallel with all these government initiated changes.

A draft Core Strategy (1<sup>st</sup> draft) was produced with a view to it then being compliant with then National Policy and the RSS. A consultation was launched in 2008.

The WM RSS had been initially adopted on the basis of a three stage review. A revised core Strategy (2<sup>nd</sup> draft) was prepared to be compliant with the emerging revisions to the RSS. Following an Examination in Public in 2009 and subsequent Planning Inspectors recommendations, the revised RSS was ready for adoption. The core Strategy, 2<sup>nd</sup> draft was published for consultation in February 2010. Unexpectedly, the then Government did not adopt the RSS revisions.

A new government was elected in May 2010 and they promised to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. Consequently, a revised Core Strategy (3<sup>rd</sup> draft) was prepared using emerging government policy drafts. This draft would be adaptable to ensure compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

All these changes were the result of a need to be compliant with other planning policies and statements. The shifting sands of Government have handicapped us, though the saved Local Plan policies are applicable and protected within the NPPF.

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