Rotherham Local Development Framework “Front Loaders” Event

Final Minutes

Attendance

RMBC Neighbourhoods  Michelle Musgrave
RMBC Neighbourhoods  Chris Brown
RMBC Chief Executives  Joanne Werhle
RMBC EDS – Forward Planning  Phil Turnidge
RMBC EDS – Forward Planning  Andy Duncan
RMBC EDS – Forward Planning  Dave Edwards
RMBC EDS – Forward Planning  Helen Sleigh
RMBC EDS – Forward Planning  Peter Thormborrow
RMBC EDS – Forward Planning  Lisa Taylor
RMBC EDS – Transportation Planner  Paul Gibson
RMBC EDS – RIDO  David Edmondson
RMBC Legal  Ken McDonald
Waverley Community Connects  Steve Ruffle
Council for Protection of Rural England  John Spottiswood
Environment Agency  Martin Slater
Home Builders Federation  Gen Berridge
South Yorkshire Forest  Krys Craik
South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive  Michael Long, David Allott
NAI Fuller Peiser  John Dunshea
Anston Parish Council  Mike Gazur
Community Representative  David Thomas
Development Land & Planning  Nichola Smith
Ravenfield Parish Council  Alan Scholes
JHV Consultants  Rob Edmunds
Braithwell & Micklebring Parish Council  Roger Greenwood
Rotherham Tourism Office  Joanne Edley
Whiston Parish Council  George Skinner
Doncaster Council  Michael Whitehead

Welcome and Introductions

Phil Turnidge gave a welcome and introduced members of the Forward Planning Section. It was explained that the ‘Front-loaders’ group was intended to represent those organisations and individuals (both RMBC external and internal) who wish to have a more in-depth involvement in LDF preparation. The Group will help inform RMBC’s plans to consult on the various LDF components as well as to guide its actual preparation. The workshop was introduced as the first front-loaders event to discuss the preparatory work for the LDF’s Core Strategy as set out in the consultation pack sent out to all invitees to the event.
Presentations

Presentations were given on:

- Core Strategy – Andy Duncan
- Spatial Planning Zones – Helen Sleigh
- Sustainability Appraisal – David Edwards

Questions and Answers following presentations:

- **Sustainability Appraisal.**

  - Q. What is the status of the Core Strategy Objectives?
  - A. It was outlined that the 30 Core Strategy Objectives informed preparation of the Core Strategy Options and should not be confused with the 22 Sustainability Appraisal Objectives which are used to appraise the Core Strategy objectives, options and other LDF documents. Each Core Strategy Option satisfies the objectives in different ways and the Sustainability Appraisal would determine the “best fit”. It was also re-iterated that these options are not set in stone, are not Council policy but only being put forward to stimulate debate.

  - Q. Is the Sustainability Appraisal set by Government?
  - A. The Government has produced Guidance working to Legislation produced nationally and by the European Union. However, it has been left largely to Local Authorities to formulate their own detailed Sustainability Appraisal methodology.

  - Q. How will this process evolve?
  - A. The Sustainability Appraisal will help choose options and guide identification of a Preferred Core Strategy Option which is most likely to be not one choice of Option but a hybrid of the options.

  - Q. “Sustainability” can be a subjective term and jargon needs to be clearly explained. Terms mean different things to different people, how can this confusion be best avoided?
  - A. A glossary is provided but could be improved.

- **Spatial Planning Zones.**

  - Q. Whilst 5 broad areas was useful to understand the dynamics as a planning tool how does this apply to discrete issues such a neighbourhood deprivation or rural sites. Could cross cutting issues ‘get lost’ in zones?
  - A. The proposed spatial planning zone boundaries reflect, to an extent, ‘natural’ communities. Planners find it easier to deal with smaller spatial areas when analysing information and preparing future policies and land allocations. ‘Journey to Work’ information is a device to identify meaningful communities and travel patterns between home and places of employment. Draft PPS3 proposes the use of Housing Market Areas – these have yet to be defined and may cross borough boundaries. Spatial planning zone boundaries may have to be reflected or adjusted in the future to reflect Housing Market Area Boundaries. The Babtie work was highlighted as a useful reflection of discrete communities.
Q. Spatial Zones were recognised as a good idea but the use of commuting patterns was queried.
A. It was outlined that this method was supported by good data collection (at the output area level) and showed how communities relate to one another. Although commuting patterns was not the sole factor used to identify the zones, it was stressed that these areas were only intended to provide a device to determine settlement pattern dynamics.

Q. Shouldn't the pro-environment elements be equally protected by the planning process whichever option is chosen?
A. Yes, the planning process will protect interests equally but the provision of alternative options is intended as a device to stimulate debate and to stress differences between options, i.e. environmental elements more likely to be most successfully protected under the pro-environment option.

- Core Strategy.

- What is the difference between the UDP and the LDF?
- The LDF is the next generation of Development Plans and will gradually replace the existing UDP as and when the various elements of the LDF are prepared and adopted. Flowing from the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the LDF is designed to be loose leaf and be more responsive to changes and needs of the community than the UDP. The UDP provides a baseline that will help guide Core Strategy Options development. Again it was stressed that the Options are not exclusive and that the likely preferred Option will be a ‘pick and mix’ variation of the current options as well as the UDP baseline.

The following two questions, taken from the Consultation Pack sent to invitees prior to the event, were also offered for discussion:

Q. Has the LDF process and associated jargon been adequately explained enabling you to engage in discussions about the Core Strategy Spatial Options?
A. The process does involve the use of jargon but the use of a glossary is welcomed although it was recognised it could be improved. The use of a Reader’s Panel was suggested.

Q. Are the emerging draft options sufficiently easy to understand? If not, how might wider understanding be improved?
A. The consensus of the meeting was “yes”. The use of options to compare side by side was helpful but it may be useful to present this information in pamphlet form with explanatory bullet points. It also needed to be clarified that although options were presented they were not exclusive and other approached would be fully considered. It should be more clearly explained the intention that the final Option will not simply be the choice of any one of the Options presented but a hybrid identifying the best aspects of each.

Workshop Activity (Group Based)

Attendees were asked to join one of three groups, places having been pre-allocated focussing upon three broad areas of interest:

- Retail/ Leisure and Transport
- Waste and Environment
- Housing, Employment and Industry

Facilitated discussion took place for 1¼ hours focussing upon how the identified areas of interest are likely to be affected by the suggested Core Strategy Options and whether any additional or hybrid options could be identified. Following introductions, each group initiated discussion by reviewing social, economic and environmental changes in Rotherham over the past 15 years and anticipating what might happen over the next 15 years (LDF plan period).

Workshop Activity Feedback.

Yellow Group – facilitated by Andy Duncan covering Retail / Leisure and Transport.

Key Points raised:-

- It would be helpful to emphasise the fact that this is the vision for the next fifteen years and then highlight the options.
- It would be helpful to explain the constraints of Government guidance and the Regional Spatial Strategy that will effect the eventual outcome.
- A summary of the SA would be more ‘palatable’.
- There is an issue of practicality regarding relational timescales i.e., the Local Transport Plan should fit with the LDF but they have different timeframes.
- An explanation of the purpose of the Core Strategy would be useful (i.e. accommodating household growth, locating housing, providing for employment needs etc.) along with generally less jargon (i.e. “approach” rather than “option” or “scenario”). RSS wording of “what, where and how much” could be useful.
- As the whole of Yorkshire and Humber is now broadband enabled the growth of home working should be reflected in the SA and the potential for less need to travel considered. Also need to consider the potential impact on town centres if people do travel less.
- Need to address the major issue of providing affordable housing.
- There could be improvements made to better address the role of planning and why planning has such an important purpose as an introduction to the Core Strategy.
- The possibility of merging the SA panel with the front-loaders club was suggested.
- Need to recognise the contribution of the private sector in delivering development.
- Use of three options tends to steer you towards picking one – need to make the possibility of a hybrid option or different options more explicit.


Key Points raised:-

- Discussion started with a review of changes within the society, economy and environment of Rotherham over the previous fifteen years, such as the decline of industry, changes to colliery landscapes. Looking forward to the next fifteen years (LDF Plan Period) it was suggested the climate change agenda will have enhanced importance and that the environment will be more regarded as an “asset” to encourage investment, e.g. through tourism. Whilst pollution was once very visible it is less visible now but remains an issue of concern.

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It should be stressed that certain regulations and requirements will apply whichever option or hybrid option is eventually chosen. The Market always works within a framework of legislation – the role of the LDF is to decide how to plan to address Rotherham’s identified key sustainability issues.

As an issue, ‘environment’ could been seen as an area where the pro-market and pro-environment options could merge through, for example, encouragement of new innovative environmental industries. The Options should avoid giving the impression that the market and the environment are mutually exclusive.

It was noted the Pro-Market Option was largely reactive and the Pro-Environment as proactive.

The realism of the options was queried. For example, why was the Waverley development left out of the Pro-Environment Option – it was explained that this development is less likely to be actively encouraged through the pro-environment option and would be of a different nature to that under the pro-market option.

There were key omissions on the maps such as the South Yorkshire Forest and proposed Wetland creation areas (e.g. Dearne Valley).

Pro-environment map should emphasise the likely emphasis on ‘enhancement’ of built and natural heritage not just protection.

Whilst the maps recognise nature conservation designations, they should also recognise the built environment e.g. proposed new conservation areas.

Should be noted that the ‘zonings’ on the maps need not automatically exclude other development types – for example some development could still occur within the Pro-Environment Option’s ‘positive land management areas’.

Two group members particularly welcomed Rotherham’s approach to Core Strategy formulation as a very useful stimulus for debate and suggested this approach was well advanced compared to other authorities within the region.

Should consider how to fully represent the plans of other agencies, not just RMBC, e.g. Highway schemes and the Environment Agency’s flood risk areas. The maps could also try to represent effects of climate change (e.g. drought and migration patterns).

Red Group – facilitated by Helen Sleigh covering Housing, Employment and Industry

Key points raised:-

- Discussion initially focussed on a vision for the Borough
- In the 2021 Vision political boundaries should be less important as people commute further to work and loyalties to particular communities weakens. Interrelationships between areas will become stronger as people make personal choices to live and work in different localities
- Concern expressed that in the RSS Vision a City Region is promoted; but will this mean that Sheffield becomes the ever more dominant community? Will Rotherham become a service centre for Sheffield?
- Recognises the market to facilitate delivery
- In 2021 travel to work issues may not be such a concern
- Concern of being a “poor relation” to Sheffield
- Energy problems in the future could reinforce the role of small / local centres. The Northern Way actively promotes travelling to Leeds / Manchester for very specific services
- Is the planning system hindering competitive growth
Settlement hierarchy was determined largely by coalfields but that is not necessarily the basis for future investment. In creating a hierarchy of sustainable settlements transport links are vital. Not every village will have sufficient facilities to support the needs of the community.

Air quality is an increasingly important issue and this could impact on where houses are built and long distance commuting.

Need to consider the social capital invested into communities. What is their raison d’etre? Should we consider future job creation in these communities to meet local needs?

The Babtie study supports the creation and maintenance of local service centres but in an identified hierarchy of communities geographically spread throughout the Borough.

Much of the Borough’s landscape was created by coal mining and the area is perceived to be industrially degraded by inward investors. It is essential that the environment is improved in its widest sense.

Recognition that globalisation of the economy is occurring and what can places like Rotherham do to attract inward investors?

The image that is portrayed by Rotherham and south Yorkshire is vital to attracting inward investment. Ref. made to Orwell’s “Road to Wigan Pier” – Sheffield Road Rotherham. The economic and environmental resources available in Rotherham are vital to the future prosperity of Rotherham. Look at the improvements made in the Dearne Valley compared to 10 years ago – however concern expressed that this was not necessarily an appropriate location to focus scarce resources (based on settlement patterns established through the location of coal mines in the past). How attractive is this location to inward investors? Are we promoting an unsustainable settlement pattern in the Dearne Valley?

However it was acknowledged that we need to keep the momentum going regarding the reclamation of derelict land. Improving the image of Rotherham is vital to maintain and improve the prosperity of the Borough. The former landscape of coalfield dereliction should be improved.

Focus on Dearne Valley transport links across to Doncaster and Barnsley is vital.

Within Sheffield the substantial investment into supertram infrastructure has revitalised Sheffield – could this type of infrastructure investment achieve the same outcome in Rotherham?

Need to link LDF with LEA and actively promote the attraction and retention of graduates. Work based learning needs to be promoted. Two pronged approach “grow our own economy” as well as inward investment.

In the early – mid ‘90’s the only way to achieve restoration of derelict land was through derelict land grant and planning permissions for hard after uses. But initially funding for restoration to soft after uses was not funded.

What are people’s aspirations? What housing choice needs to be provided? Where should new jobs and houses be located? Understanding of the Housing Market Areas (as proposed by draft PPS 3) is essential.

People don’t leave their traditional communities easily; it is essential that links are properly resourced. Transport links to services and jobs are essential for communities. The more deprived communities have a lack of income to support private transport but are often forced to provide a car to access job opportunities where shift working or early starts are required.

Cross boundary linkages are vital to adjoining Counties and Boroughs.

The affordability of housing is a big issue and the differences between the “haves” and “have nots” becomes more pronounced. The stock is in many cases of poor quality. How does the planning system deal with this issue?
Where will the funding and investment for the future come from? It is highly unlikely that this Borough will see the same level of public sector investment that it has done in the recent past. Private sector investment will be vital in the future. This is a different driver to the previous driver when funding was mainly via the public purse.

Concern was expressed regarding “Planning Gain Supplement”. There is a very fine line between the development progressing and prevention of the development - a housing development site has recently produced a negative land value as a result of reclamation costs and requirements through the S106 planning gain.

In south Yorkshire there was recognition of the need for grants and funding.

Recognised that the social and community enterprise sector is fragile in Rotherham

Support for the Community and Social Enterprise sector is required from public agencies. Also consideration should be given to the RMBC Procurement Strategy and how this strategy can assist the S &C E sector.

More support should be given to local companies – reuse of backyards / outbuildings for residential purposes “gobbles up” potential workspace for budding entrepreneurs. There needs to be a hierarchy of workspace to meet the needs of all sectors.

Consideration needs to be given to the community ownership of buildings. What about the long term ownership of housing and the environment should aspects of these areas be owned / managed by local people?

We need to share the 2021 Spatial Vision (along with the Community Strategy Vision with communities and seek their views – real choices need to be given to communities and stakeholders. Communities are suffering from consultation fatigue and are cynical about the reasons behind the consultation. Don’t just pay “lip service” to community views. It is essential that an open debate is had. Don’t decide everything now – listen to what people want first.

Options have been presented as black and white – it should be a continuum. Option B is not the only approach.

The LDF should be delivered with “more passion” and an offer of a reading panel for documentation was offered.

Workshop Conclusion and the Next Steps.

Phil Turnidge explained that this event was only the start of the process.

The next steps will include:-

- Amend Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report following recent consultation.
- Refine Core Strategy Objectives following initial sustainability appraisal.
- Sustainability Appraise Core Strategy Options.
- Finalise Options and Sustainability Appraisal Report
- Ongoing informal consultation on Core Strategy Options and Sustainability Appraisal Results (Feb / Mar ’06).
- Amend Core Strategy Options and undertake public participation for Preferred Core Strategy Objectives & Options and Sustainability Appraisal (May ’06).
- Development of Preferred Option as basis for Core Strategy development and supporting Policies and Allocations Development Plan Documents.