



GOVERNMENT OFFICE
FOR THE NORTH WEST

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Dear Ms Fisher

At our meeting on Friday 14 July, you asked me to provide some material in support of two statements contained in my letter of 11 April to all North West local authorities.

The guidance in my letter was designed to ensure that submitted local development plan documents not only meet the minimum regulatory requirements of the new legislative framework, but also reflect the broader aims of the new planning system which include the production of high quality spatial planning documents with a wide local ownership; Planning Inspectors will be scrutinising submitted development plan documents closely to ensure that these issues have been addressed in determining whether or not they meet the tests of "soundness", principally by ensuring that they are consistent with Government Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). Test of soundness iv requires that the DPD "is a spatial plan which is consistent with national planning policy.....".

In relation therefore to your request for elucidation on the statement in paragraph 3 of the letter, that "*For Core Strategies and most Area Action Plans the options should be alternate strategic spatial options, effectively alternative scenarios for the future development of the area*", I would refer to guidance in PPS1 para 32 (i): in preparing spatial plans, planning authorities should "set a clear vision for the future pattern of development, with clear objectives for achieving that vision and strategies for delivery and implementation.....Plans should guide patterns of development and seek to manage changes to the areas they cover". PPS12 says (Para 2.10) that "the core strategy should set out the long term spatial vision for the authority's area and the strategic policies required to deliver that vision" and subsequently (Para 4.13) that "The aim of this formal participation on preferred options stage is to give people the opportunity to comment on how the local planning authority is approaching the preparation of the particular development plan document and to ensure that the local planning authority is aware of all possible options before they prepare the submission development plan document". It also says (Para 4.12) that "The options must be of sufficient detail for the type of development plan document envisaged, to enable meaningful community involvement and the sustainability appraisal". The Companion Guide to PPS12 "Creating Local Development Frameworks" gives some detail (Checklist 8b p.93) about what should be included in the preferred options report: "Summary of proposed strategy, including options for the type, mix and location of development" and goes on to give some policy theme examples.

With regard to my statement that "*a central purpose of the issues and options stage of the process should be to generate options by encouraging stakeholders and the community to think about the ways in which the district should develop*", it is fundamental to the principle of "frontloading" that the local





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community is involved in, and takes ownership of the options for addressing the needs of their area at an early stage, so helping avoid options becoming the subject of extended debate at examination. PPS12 says (Para 3.2) that LPAs “should involve the community at an early stage in the preparation of local development documents. This is essential to achieve local ownership and legitimacy for the policies that will shape the future distribution of land uses and development in an authority’s area”. Later (Para 4.11) it says “Local planning authorities should seek the involvement of relevant groups and organisations in the development of this information base as this will help them to identify the issues which the development plan document needs to address and the options which are available to deal with those issues”.

The Way Forward

It might be useful, finally, if I summarise what I think we agreed as a way forward for the authority in the light of our earlier representations on the preferred options reports. For both reports we explained that they needed to present, in essence, a number of strategic spatial scenarios for the Borough (or for Rawtenstall in respect of the area action plan), leaving the door open to options other than that preferred by the local authority (including any which might be put forward in representations). Such scenarios may be presented in the form of an outline policy proposal, or series of proposals. However the inclusion of a suite of detailed draft policies is not essential and indeed presenting such detail only in respect of the preferred option risks, in our view, undermining the options exercise eg by affording the other options less weight.

We agreed that it might be wise to consider the production of either revised preferred options reports to reflect the above, or alternatively “addenda” to the existing reports. In both cases it was agreed that draft documents would be sent to the GO for comment before any further formal consultation took place, and we would see that as the best way to help you address the issues we discussed.

I hope this is helpful. Please let me know if any of the above is unclear or contrary to your own understanding of what was agreed. Meanwhile we look forward to continue working closely with you on the production of your local development framework.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Anne Storah.

Yours sincerely

STEVE FYFE