

<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Decision Type:</b> Key
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<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny (29 <sup>th</sup> June 2026) and Cabinet (30 <sup>th</sup> June 2026)	<b>Date:</b> 30 June 2026
<b>Subject:</b>	Simister Bowlee Development Framework	
<b>Report of</b>	Leader of the Council	

### Summary

1. This report sets out the results of the consultation on the draft Simister Bowlee Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document and seeks approval for the final SPD to be adopted.
2. It should be noted that, as a joint SPD for Bury and Rochdale, the document requires the approval of both districts and the following Cabinet recommendations are subject to approval by Rochdale's Cabinet on 23 June.

### Recommendation(s)

3. It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny:
  - i. Note the responses to the public consultation and proposed post consultation revisions set out in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to this report.
4. Subject to approval by Rochdale, it is recommended that Cabinet:
  - i. Note the responses to the public consultation and proposed post consultation revisions set out in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to this report;
  - ii. Approve the revised SPD as the final version to be adopted and published;
  - iii. Delegate authority to the Executive Director (Place) to make any minor, non-material editorial amendments to the SPD ahead of its final publication.

### Reasons for recommendation(s)

5. The adoption of the document will establish a framework against which future planning applications on the site will be considered, sets out high level design and development principles for the site and an approach to the delivery and phasing of infrastructure on and off site.

### Alternative options considered and rejected

6. No other options were considered/were applicable.

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**Background**

7. The Places for Everyone Plan (PfE) is a joint development plan document of nine of the ten Greater Manchester authorities (excluding Stockport MBC) which was adopted on 21st March 2024.
8. It is a long-term plan for jobs, new homes and sustainable growth which allocates large strategic sites for employment and housing. This includes the residential allocation at Simister Bowlee (PfE Policy JPA1.2) which straddles the districts of Bury and Rochdale.
9. The Simister Bowlee site forms part of the wider 'Northern Gateway' that also includes the nationally significant employment-led development opportunity to the north of the M62 at Heywood / Pilsworth (PfE Policy JPA1.1), which has its own separate Development Framework SPD that was adopted in March 2025.
10. The Simister Bowlee site is a housing-led development opportunity that will deliver:
  - 1,550 new homes (1,350 of which are in Bury);
  - Affordable housing in line with policy (currently 25% equating to around 335 affordable homes in Bury);
  - Specialist and older persons' accommodation;
  - A new two-form entry primary school – located within the Bury part of the site;
  - New community and retail facilities to serve the needs of the new and existing residents;
  - A new spine road through the site to provide access throughout the site and enable active travel movement;
  - Off-site highway works to mitigate for the development;
  - An active travel network including cycleways and pedestrian links;
  - Green infrastructure, including public open space, sports facilities and playgrounds;

- Ecological mitigation and biodiversity net gain;
  - Surface water attenuation, SuDS and measures to protect hydrology and water quality.
11. The Simister Bowlee site provides the opportunity to deliver a comprehensive new neighbourhood that will support the sustainable growth of Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone and the transformational employment-led opportunity within the wider Northern Gateway at JPA1.1.

### **Simister Bowlee Development Framework**

12. Following its adoption on 21 March 2024, the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan (PfE) became a key part of Bury's statutory development plan alongside the saved policies of the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and the Greater Manchester Joint Minerals and Waste Plans.
13. A key requirement of PfE Policy JPA1.2 is that any proposals within the Simister Bowlee allocation must be in accordance with a comprehensive masterplan that has been agreed by Bury and Rochdale local planning authorities'.
14. The Simister Bowlee Development Framework (SBDF) has been prepared jointly by Bury and Rochdale Councils with technical input from the Northern Gateway Development Vehicle LLP as the main site promoter and input from other landowners / stakeholders.
15. The document has been prepared as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which builds upon and provides more detailed advice and guidance on policies in an adopted development plan. SPDs can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues.
16. As they do not form part of the development plan, SPDs cannot introduce new planning policies into the development plan. However, they are a material consideration in the decision-making process when determining particular planning applications.
17. The intention is that the SBDF will be a mechanism to help identify, shape and guide the comprehensive development of the site. Its purpose is to establish strategic overarching development principles, define spatial priorities and provide some additional, high-level clarity around matters such as land use, connectivity, design quality, infrastructure requirements, sustainability, and placemaking objectives.
18. The SBDF is therefore intended to guide future development in a coordinated way and ensure that proposals come forward in accordance with the wider strategic vision and adopted policy objectives.

19. Whilst it provides more detail than what is set out under PFE Policy JPA1.2, it is important to recognise that the SBDF is a strategic-level document.
20. Planning applications will be required to provide more detailed evidence and clarity on a range of issues, including those that are set out in the SBDF. The strategic direction, indicative layouts and policy position in the SBDF would be fully tested at the planning application stage. This includes providing detailed design information, technical assessments, environmental considerations, access arrangements, landscaping, infrastructure delivery, viability considerations and other supporting evidence necessary to demonstrate that development can be delivered appropriately and in accordance with planning policy.
21. In this way, the process moves from high-level strategic policy and site-wide principles through to the detailed assessment and determination of individual development proposals. The indicative nature of certain elements of the SBDF at this current strategic stage reflects established planning process and does not preclude the need for detailed technical assessments at the planning application stage.

### **Summary of Consultation and Responses**

22. On the 11<sup>th</sup> February, members approved a draft SBDF for consultation purposes. In accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, consultation was subsequently undertaken over a six-week period running from 13<sup>th</sup> February 2026 to 27<sup>th</sup> March 2026 to establish stakeholder views on its content.
23. In Bury, all relevant documentation was available for inspection on the Council's website, copies of the document were made available for inspection in the reception area of the Town Hall; and at local libraries and the Tottington Centre. Letters/emails were also sent to all contacts on the Strategic Planning consultation database, posters were placed in key locations and the consultation was also advertised via social media platforms. A number of drop-in events were also held across the two boroughs in February and March.
24. The consultation generated a total of 224 responses specific to SBDF. A further 42 joint responses were submitted which were a combined response to the Elton Reservoir, Walshaw and Simister Bowlee Development Frameworks. A detailed summary of these and the Councils' response to them are set out in the Consultation Statement at Appendix 1 to this report. In summary the main issues raised were as follows:

- Traffic congestion and highway safety – comments relating to the capacity of the road network, cumulative impacts from other developments, previous planning decisions and concerns regarding recent accidents;
- Public transport and sustainability – lack of existing bus services and improvements would not reduce car dependency from the new development;
- Drainage, flood risk and utilities – comments stating that large areas of the site have surface water flooding and development would not address this. Concern regarding utility infrastructure given that large parts of the area rely on septic tanks with limited or no public foul sewer capacity;
- Outdated evidence base – Comments seeking updated evidence relating to traffic counts, drainage modelling and viability;
- Economic viability and deliverability – Various comments relating to the wider Atom Valley, the need for the scale housing to support growth and the low levels of delivery up until 2030;
- Affordable housing policy – Comments questioning validity of the current figure stating that based on recent guidance there should be more affordable housing but that this would not be viable given other infrastructure costs;
- Green Belt, environment and wildlife – A number of objections to loss of open countryside and perceived Green Belt, impact on wildlife and view that open space created/retained in the development would not compensate for this loss;
- Community impact and amenity – Comments included the loss of rural character, increased noise and pollution, reduced property values and pressure on social infrastructure;
- Health Facilities – comments relating to the provision of health facilities to meet additional needs;
- Procedural and legal concerns – comments suggesting that the SBDF fails the NPPF soundness tests and is based on incomplete evidence;

25. A significant number of comments objected to development in the Green Belt but it should be noted that the Simister Bowlee site was removed from the Green Belt and allocated for housing following the adoption of PfE in March 2024. PfE was subject to a comprehensive two-year Examination in Public, where independent Planning Inspectors considered all the evidence and representations made around the plan (including extensive objections on the site allocations). A key part of the examination was for the Inspectors to assess whether PfE was prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and whether it was sound i.e. that it was positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. The legal outcome of that process removed the site from the Green Belt and the principle of residential development on the site at Simister Bowlee is therefore not a debate that can be re-opened.

26. In addition, a significant number of comments related to the lack of evidence supporting the SBDF. At this stage of the planning process the evidence is proportionate to the fact that the SBDF is still a strategic plan that provides an indicative layout. Planning applications within the site will need to be

supported by more detailed and up-to-date evidence. This will include Transport Assessments to assess the impact of development on the highways network, ecology surveys to identify existing wildlife habitats, including protected species, and to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are put in place and flood and drainage strategies to ensure that any flood risk issues are addressed and mitigated for.

27. In response to the comments received regarding the procedural and legal process, the Council is satisfied that SBDF has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Regulations) 2012 (as amended).
28. The amendments made to the SBDF have focussed on dealing with specific responses relevant to the document itself as the principle of residential development on the site has already been established and is not a matter for the SBDF or the consultation process. Likewise, updated evidence will be available to review when planning applications are submitted.
29. The consideration of these comments has led to the conclusion that the SBDF would benefit from several changes prior to it being formally adopted. In particular:
  - More clarity in the introduction on the scope and purpose of the SBDF SPD and specifying matters that are more appropriate for the planning application e.g. submission of more detailed evidence to support any planning application.
  - Amendments to the wording in the section relating to Access, Highways and Movement. This change sets out more clearly the consideration of the Transport Assessment and how the highways authority must fully agree the transport measures, interventions and mitigation required. This includes the need for a site wide assessment that takes account of cumulative impacts from other developments including JAP1.1. Heywood / Pilsworth;
  - Changes to the text to provide more understanding of the range of constraints in relation to flood risk, drainage and utilities and how these should be addressed;
  - Linked to the above, strengthening the requirement for a site-wide flood risk and drainage strategy;
  - More clarity on the provision of, and contributions to, school places;
  - Amendments to the section on ecology and trees to pick up some of the environmental and wildlife comments including the need for a site-wide ecology strategy;
  - Amendments to the green infrastructure section to require a site-wide landscape strategy;

- Amendments to the open space, sport and recreation section to require a site-wide open space, sport and recreation framework;
- New paragraph in the development principles section on design which requires new development to ensure there will be no unacceptable adverse impacts on the amenity of the surrounding area;
- A change to the masterplan framework to include an alternative location to the local centre to provide flexibility to ensure appropriate phasing of the development;
- A glossary has been added in to help to explain a number of terms and references within the SBDF which makes it easier to understand
- Other specific changes relating to wording in the text and on plans to improve clarity and accuracy;

30. The updated version of the SBDF SPD is attached at Appendix 2 which also shows those parts of the document (highlighted) that have been amended.

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#### **Links with the Corporate Priorities:**

31. Places for Everyone forms part of Bury's statutory development plan. It sets out statutory policies and strategic site allocations that will guide future growth and development in the Borough. A key part of the plan is to rebalance the Greater Manchester economy by significantly boosting the economic output from the north through the delivery of new housing and employment that will benefit both Bury and its residents. The 'Let's Do It' strategy specifically refers to Places for Everyone as having a key role to play in the delivery of its objectives and priorities

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#### **Equality Impact and Considerations:**

32. The analysis has considered the impacts of this activity across all characteristics, the analysis has identified that the impacts are neutral with planned mitigations and there are no equalities concerns at this stage. EQIA will be kept under review for the duration of this activity.

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#### **Environmental Impact and Considerations:**

33. Environmental impacts and concerns will be assessed and monitored as project delivery commences and will be in-line with existing Council policies. The Simister Bowlee Development Framework will seek to meet policy requirements, including physical, social and environmental impacts including biodiversity net gain

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### Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
The post consultation amendments are not accepted.	The amendments are a result of public consultation and having considered the responses received.
The final SBDF is not approved.	A previous Cabinet report approved the draft SBDF. The final SBDF has been amended in responses to comments received and updated information which has become available.

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### Procurement Implications:

34. Any future sourcing of a developer or contractor must be compliant with the Procurement Act.

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### Legal Implications:

35. The preparation, consultation and adoption of an SPD must be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Regulations) 2012 (as amended). The length of and method of consultation on the draft SPD was in excess of the minimum required of the Council under the Regulations and was considered proportionate and reasonable by the Council. Whilst criticisms have been made of the consultation process the Council undertook these are not considered valid by the Council. Further, the amendments made to the draft SPD arising from the consultation process evidence the robustness of the consultation process and the recommendations contained in the report are considered by the Council to adhere to the requirements of those regulations.

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### Financial Implications:

36. There are no direct financial implications resulting from the adoption of the SPD.

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### Appendices:

Appendix 1 – SBDF Consultation Statement

Appendix 2 – Revised Simister Bowlee Development Framework Supplementary Planning Document.

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### Background papers:

None.

**Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
PfE	Places for Everyone