

Planning Policy Working Group 22 February 2017

PREPARING FOR THE LOCAL PLAN REGULATION 18 CONSULTATION

1. Purpose of this Note

- 1.1 Work is proceeding apace on the local plan and this Note sets out the next formal stage of the process and the methodology that is being followed in preparing the Plan for members' consideration.

2. Progress to Date

- 2.1 Since the initiation of the 'Pause' in decision making the officers have focussed on testing updated Objectively Assessed Housing Need targets, finalising the local plan evidence base, and pursuing discussions with neighbouring authorities.
- 2.2 Expert independent advice has been given by a Visiting Local Plans Inspector, and also the Planning Advisory Service/ Intelligent Plans and Examinations, which have concluded that the District Council is following a reasonable methodology for the preparation of the local plan. All this expert independent advice is being followed in completing the evidence base and finalising the spatial strategy for the local plan.

3. Key Strategic Issues Being Addressed

- 3.1 A significant opportunity that arises out of the 'Pause' is to test a revised Objectively Assessed Need target of 14,100 new homes up until 2033. This higher housing target requires testing the delivery of up to three new settlement proposals, as well as examining reasonable alternative sites across the district.
- 3.2 The aim is to prepare a preferred local plan spatial strategy for member consideration in June 2017 to allow 'Regulation 18' consultation with the public and stakeholders between late July and the end of August 2017 (under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning [Local Planning] Regulations 2012 the District Council may consult the public and various stakeholders on a draft local plan, or elements of the local plan). This stage of consultation is not compulsory. There are a range of issues that need to be addressed to allow this, however, there are three significant themes that are especially important in this work and these are set out below.

Transport and Traffic Modelling

- 3.3 Existing highway capacity is a significant constraint to development within the district. All of the emerging strategic sites are subject to traffic modelling and, at the time of writing, work is focussed on examining strategic allocation proposals at Saffron Walden and also Great Chesterford. Officers are also looking at the cumulative impact of spatial strategy options as well as the position with individual strategic sites. Officers intend to reach a definitive recommendation on the proposed spatial strategy for the whole district, at least in principle, for a Regulation 18 Draft Plan report in June 2017.

Delivery of New Development

- 3.4 One of the preferred new settlement proposals is at Easton Park where there are proposals for 1,400 new homes to be delivered within the plan period. The key issue here is that part of the site is currently an active aggregate quarry with a mineral processing plant and the quarry has planning permission until 2032. The site promoter contends that the quarry operation will not prejudice the phased development proposal and this view is currently being tested. If this view is accepted, then a Statement of Common Ground will be prepared between the District Council, Essex County Council, as Minerals Authority, and also the landowner. This issue will need to be resolved in principle before June 2017.

Duty to Co-operate

- 3.5 There are two significant issues in relation to the 'Duty to Co-operate' and the emerging Spatial Strategy. The first is in relation to the new settlement proposal for Great Chesterford and the second is the proposed new settlement west of Braintree.
- 3.6 The Great Chesterford site is close to the county boundary and within the Cambridge Sub-region SHMA area. Consequently there is a statutory duty to engage constructively with South Cambridgeshire District Council and also Cambridgeshire County Council. A number of meetings have taken place with officers of both County Councils and South Cambs. The main issue is the completion of traffic modelling work and representatives of the four authorities and also Highways England are collaborating on this work. The transport position, and any other strategic issues, will need to be resolved in principle before June 2017 and it is proposed that a Statement of Common Ground would then be agreed by all the authorities if the allocation is to be pursued.
- 3.7 The position with respect to a new settlement at West Braintree is also linked to the Braintree District Council Local Plan which is expected to be considered by the Full Council of that authority for publication on 5 June 2017. The principal issue is the phasing of development and the apportionment of housing numbers within the plan period of both our plan and the Braintree Local Plan (there is a prospect of a planning application for mineral extraction on part of the site within Braintree). There is a mutual interest for both authorities to agree this phasing before June 2017 and then to sign a Joint Memorandum of Understanding.

4. Next Formal Stage in the Process

- 4.1 The next key stage is for the Council to approve the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan for consultation. It is proposed that this consultation will be based upon a full draft local plan.
- 4.2 The approach that is being taken by officers is based on objectively prepared technical evidence and if, during the next few weeks, it becomes clear that any potential strategic areas/ allocations may not be deliverable within the plan period then alternative proposals will be considered and recommended. The Council does have discretion to consult on part of the Local Plan during the Regulation 18 stage and could opt to focus on the strategic allocations if this was considered preferable.
- 4.3 It is not proposed to adopt a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) at this stage until the issues referred to above have been resolved satisfactorily, this is unlikely to be before late Spring 2017. It is considered important that the revised LDS can be agreed with as much certainty as possible. It should also be noted that the LDS is not

only about local plan preparation but also about all the planning policy documents of the local authority and a later decision date allows the latest information to be included.

- 4.4 The strong officer recommendation is that the Regulation 18 Consultation is carried out on the whole draft Local Plan between July and the end of August 2017 (please see the separate item on this agenda – Project Plan Key Milestones) . The alternative would be to only consult on the strategic elements of the draft plan however this would not allow representations to be made within the context of all of the proposed policies and proposals in the draft plan. A further alternative would be to delay this part of the process which would, in turn, delay submission of the draft Local Plan beyond Spring 2018 with all the substantial risks that would then flow from that position.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Good progress is being made on preparing the draft Local Plan. Independent experts have stated that the methodology of the Council is reasonable and the Council is following expert advice in relation to preparing the spatial strategy and its supporting evidence base.
- 5.2 It is recommended that this approach set out in this paper is adopted so that the spatial strategy can be finalised in time for member consideration in June and that the formal Regulation 18 Consultation can then take place between July 2017 and the end of August 2017.

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