

THE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW PART TWO AND SUPPORTING WORK

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That the Local Plan Review Part 2 be progressed to address the following matters, as set out in section 5 of this report:
- Non-strategic housing land allocations
 - Town centre opportunities
 - Climate Change and working towards a zero-carbon economy
 - Green infrastructure, nature recovery and landscape matters
 - Affordable Housing, including First Homes and specialist housing.
- 1.2 To agree that the updated Local Development Scheme set out in Appendix A be published to inform interested parties of the Local Plan Part Two process and timetable, including opportunities for public engagement.
- 1.3 To note that the Planning Service will also progress work on a range of supporting planning, policy and delivery matters essential to deliver sustainable growth, as set out in Section 6 of the report.
- 1.4 If warranted by planning reforms or other circumstances and in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Infrastructure, that the Local Development Scheme and Council planning work priorities be further updated for future Cabinet consideration.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to agree the future programme of work and timetable for Part 2 of the Local Plan Review, and to outline other work that will support the delivery of the Local Plan strategy. These are set out in sections 5 and 6 of the report respectively.
- 2.2 The Local Plan sets the Council's planning policies for development within its area of responsibility as Local Planning Authority, with supporting policies to guide implementation. The District Council is the planning authority for all matters within New Forest District that lie outside of the National Park, with the exception of minerals and waste planning which are the responsibility of Hampshire County Council.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 From the outset in 2016 it was intended that the Local Plan Review would be prepared in two stages. Part One would establish a planning strategy, including targets for housing and other growth requirements, and strategic (larger) site allocations to provide for the delivery of identified needs for development in the district. These are based on the relevant national planning policies in place during the time of preparation.
- 3.2 The Council adopted the New Forest District Local Plan 2016-2036 Part 1: Planning Strategy for the district outside the National Park in July 2020 (hereafter the LPP1).

The new Planning Strategy for the District marks a fundamental change in direction from the prevalent planning strategy of development restraint that had been in place in the district since the late 1980s. It enables the delivery of substantially higher levels of housing growth across the district, as expected by the Government's 'standard methodology' for setting housing requirements.

- 3.3 The LPP1 only reviewed other policies insofar as they impacted on the change in planning strategy for the area. The LPP1 document appendices list a range of previous Local Plan policies saved for continued use and future review. It is the review of these remaining policy matters, together with any new priorities such as opportunities in town centres, that now needs to be considered in the programme of work.

4. CONTEXT - NATIONAL POLICY CHANGES

- 4.1 Shortly after the adoption of the LPP1 the government published the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper to consult on further fundamental and wide ranging changes to the planning system. The Council paused work on the Local Plan Part Two until it became clearer whether further work would be overtaken by events.
- 4.2 A full government response to the White Paper consultation is due later this year. This is expected to clarify their current thinking on the more structural changes being considered for plan-making to introduce a zonal planning system where development allocations have the equivalent of outline planning permission, and introducing standard national policies for Development Management. If progressed such changes would require significant new legislation, regulations and guidance, and significant lead-in time to introduce (probably later in this parliament).
- 4.3 In December 2020 the Government announced a decision on one key element of the planning reform proposals, and updated national policy for calculating housing need to achieve 300,00 homes per annum. The changes made uplift need calculations in major urban centres only, with no material change to the approach in place at the time the Local Plan Part 1 was examined.
- 4.4 The Environment Bill, which is progressing through Parliament, also provides a context for local environmental policies relevant to plan-making. The Bill makes various provisions including about targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment; about waste and resource efficiency; about air and water quality; and about nature and biodiversity. The Council has already introduced requirement (set out in the Bill) to achieve biodiversity net gain as part of new development, and further measures set out in the Bill offer opportunities for proactive environmental management.
- 4.5 Taking the three preceding points together it can reasonably be concluded that an immediate full Local Plan review is not necessary on housing need grounds, and that it appears prudent to resume the Local Plan review to put in place the full and up-to-date policy framework needed to support the delivery of the recently adopted planning strategy. The Local Development Scheme at Appendix A sets out a programme for this work to inform interested parties of the Local Plan Part Two process and timetable, including opportunities for public engagement.
- 4.6 Whilst other national planning reforms unfold it is also prudent to progress the Local Plan Part 2 in a manner that keeps open the option of amending the process to a full local plan review if necessary. The Local Development Scheme would need to be updated further in that eventuality. In addition to the progress of possible planning reforms this provides scope to consider other strategically significant events which may justify an earlier start on the next full local plan review, such as:

- Progress with the Solent Freeport proposal with the tax sites including Port of Southampton expansion at Dibden Bay
- Related but independent aspirations by the port operator to expand the Port of Southampton at Dibden Bay
- Work the Council is involved in as part of the Partnership for South Hampshire on a subregional framework for meeting strategic development needs in Solent area.

5. LOCAL PLAN PART 2 WORK

- 5.1 Notwithstanding uncertainty over the future of Planning System in England there are some key areas of Local Plan that need to be progressed. This section sets out these priority work areas and considers how they should be progressed.
- 5.2 Non-strategic housing land allocations: LPP1 only allocated 'strategic' sites – defined as sites for 100 plus dwellings. Smaller development sites (for between 10 and 99 dwellings) remain to be identified. LPP1 assumes that at least 800 new homes will come from smaller site allocations. These opportunities need to be identified, not least for housing land supply purposes.
- 5.3 Town centre opportunities: Our High Streets and town centres are facing significant change. These changes have been accelerated by the pandemic. As a Local Planning Authority we have an important role to play in directing and assisting in delivering change in our town centres to ensure they continue to play a vital role as centres for the community. Part of this work will be looking at opportunities for increased town centre living. We need to look at how such changes can be managed positively and without diminishing the role of the town centre as a focus of community activity and as hubs of economic activity. This work will involve looking at potential sites for re-use or redevelopment as some town centre uses contract. More detailed work will be undertaken for each of the towns across the district, in part associated with the strategic development in each town and in response to the Waterside Vision.
- 5.4 Addressing Climate Change and working towards a zero-carbon economy: A much greater emphasis needs to be given to measures – including those that can be delivered through the planning system – that will promote a 'green recovery' and work progressively towards carbon neutrality. LPP1 is 'light' on such policies. However, national policies are changing and there is an opportunity for the Council to promote local policies to address climate change more pro-actively through both policies and actions. Parts of the district already have issues with air quality, water quality and flooding, affecting both communities and the natural environment.
- 5.5 Green infrastructure: Planning of green infrastructure is an important part of place-making and is especially important in this area. Not only do we need to protect and look after areas of acknowledged importance for wildlife, nature conservation and landscape quality, but green infrastructure is increasingly recognised as an essential element for the health and well-being of communities, as well as providing places for recreation and outdoor sports and enhancing the landscape and visual qualities of the area. The protection and enhancement of green infrastructure is a key element of the national agenda to promote nature recovery, enhance bio-diversity (Biodiversity Net Gain), and to deliver 'green growth'. Planning for the 'green lungs' is a vital part of planning for sustainable development.
- 5.6 Affordable Housing and First Homes: On 1 April the Government confirmed that it will introduce policies to promote the building of 'First Homes'. This will have an impact of the Council's affordable housing policies in LPP1. There may be implications for site delivery and viability. As a consequence, Policy HOU2 may need early review – this

needs to be explored (an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document will be prepared as a priority.) Work will need to be progressed with the Housing Services to consider how these changes will impact on the Council's Housing Strategy.

- 5.7 The Local Plan Part Two will not necessarily update all the previous (pre 2020) Local Plan policies currently saved for continued use. This is a matter of scope that will be kept under review pending further announcements on government planning reform e.g. proposals to introduce standardised national policies for development planning management purposes. As noted in section 6 for some key matters Supplementary Planning Documents or informal guidance will be published as an interim output before the Part 2 review is completed, so that new policies can be put into effect sooner.
- 5.8 For areas where a Neighbourhood Plan is being actively prepared and positive progress is being made, the scope and content of the Local Plan Part Two will be considered in the light of community-led planning objectives. The aim will be to work constructively and cooperatively to ensure the timely progression of a sufficient and consistent planning framework for the district as a whole, whilst avoiding unnecessary duplication. But if and where necessary the Local Plan Part Two process and supporting work will drive forward the changes required in designated Neighbourhood Planning areas.

6. OTHER RELATED WORK

- 6.1 This section identifies other work areas which will complement work on the Local Plan, and/or support and enable the sustainable delivery of the adopted LPP1 sites and strategy.

- **Town Centres, including:**

- **Fordingbridge Town Centre** with a focus on access, circulation, green infrastructure and the commercial and other facilities needed for its expanding population
- **Lymington** with a focus on green infrastructure and access and local design and local distinctiveness
- **New Milton Town Centre**, subject to the outcome of the Neighbourhood Plan referendum, to support and enable the delivery of the Plan
- **Ringwood Town Centre** with specific focus on creating a vision for the town centre in light of the growth through the strategic sites focused on bringing forward development on sites such as the Old Cinema site
- **Totton Town Centre** to deliver a Regeneration Plan to reflect the ambition of the Totton and Waterside Vision document
- **Local Design Codes** to set a place-making vision for the area and identify how new development can sustain and enhance local character through high quality design
- **Green infrastructure Strategy:** The Council has a key role to play in delivering environmental and community objectives as a provider and manager of green infrastructure across the district. Work on a Green Infrastructure Strategy will include consideration of the role of NFDC as a provider of green infrastructure and what can be achieved on our own estate.

- **Waterside Environmental Infrastructure Strategy** as set out in the Vision for the Waterside
- **Supplementary Planning Document preparation** including the following, some of which will be interim policy outputs whilst the LPP2 progresses:
 - **Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation** (an interim output from the LPP2 review process)
 - **Air Quality**
 - **Affordable Housing** (an interim output from the LPP2 review process)
 - **Employment and Skills Plan** – to provide local people with training and job opportunities through growth across the district
 - **Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP)**
 - **Parking** and related standards for new development
 - **Design for Waste Management**, standards for new development
- **A Playing Pitch Strategy** for the District
- **Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plans** (Waterside and District-wide).

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Despite the current uncertainty over the future of the planning system, it is important that the Council effectively progresses work on the key policy areas identified in this report over the next 12 months.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Budgetary provision of £350,000 has been made for Local Plan work.

9. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are none.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Significant beneficial impact associated with lifting and securing higher environmental standards and sustainability in new development.

11. EQUALITY & DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Policies and proposals will need to ensure they are no equality or diversity issues arising.

12. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 None

13. PORTFOLIO HOLDER COMMENTS

- 13.1 I support the recommendations set out in the report. While potential changes are creating some uncertainty in the Planning System in England, it is important that we make progress in key work areas, as set out.

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Background Papers:

Published government documents

Appendix A: Local Development Scheme May 2021