

CABINET 6 August 2025

Update on Local Plan Review

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>This paper seeks approval for the revised Local Development Scheme and updates on the current work programme for the Local Plan Review. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summary of comments received on the Issues and Scope consultation• An update of the evidence-based studies• The key challenges facing the Local Plan• Update on work to review specific Conservation Area Appraisals
Recommendation	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. notes the summary of comments and endorses the recommended responses to the issues and scope consultationii. approves the revised Local Development Scheme for preparing the Local Plan Reviewiii. approves the scope of the Conservation Area Appraisal reviews andiv. notes the updates on the associated evidence base work.
Reasons for recommendation	<p>We are required by law to have a local plan in place. Continuing with the preparation ensures compliance with statutory duties and avoids delays in housing, infrastructure, and development, this involves having a robust evidence base in place.</p> <p>It is important that as the Local Plan progresses that the issues of residents and stakeholders are taken on board and addressed.</p>

	<p>Having an up-to-date Local Development Scheme is a key requirement of legislation when preparing the Local Plan Review.</p> <p>Under Section 71 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 the council has a duty to formulate and publish policies for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas within the Plan Area.</p>
Ward(s)	All wards outside the National Park
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Derek Tipp – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy
Strategic Director	James Carpenter – Strategic Director for Place, Operations and Sustainability
Officer Contact	<p>Tim Guymer Assistant Director for Place Development tim.guymer@nfdc.gov.uk</p> <p>Dean Brunton Service Manager - Planning Policy, Infrastructure and Delivery dean.brunton@nfdc.gov.uk</p> <p>James Smith Planning Policy Team Leader james.smith@nfdc.gov.uk</p>

Introduction

1. Cabinet approved a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) in October 2024 setting out the planned work programme for the preparation of the Local Plan Review. At the time, this programme included:
 - Call for sites: October – December 2024
 - Consultation on a Local Plan review Issues and Scope document: February – March 2025
 - Proposed consultation on the draft Local Plan review: Autumn 2025.
2. The agreed LDS did not provide details of the complete work programme beyond Winter 2025/26.

3. This report highlights the work undertaken to date against this programme and sets out the way forward to progress the Local Plan work.

Background

4. As previously reported, the Local Plan review is a major corporate project and requires the council to act collectively to meet its statutory and legal responsibilities.
5. In respect of the wider discussion on potential devolution and local government review, the Government has made it clear that local authorities should continue to ensure local plans are kept up to-date, and progress reviews of their local plans where they are not. To this end, the council was awarded circa £200k to progress the Local Plan work with an ambition to submit this for examination by December 2026.

Issues and Scope consultation

6. The Issues and Scope consultation ran from 24 February 2025 to 4 April 2025. As well as meetings in person with a number of town and parish councils, other engagement activities included seven public exhibitions which approximately 200 members of the public attended plus the use of social media including short concise videos summarising the issues.
7. In total 124 representations were received. This marks a significant increase from when the same exercise was undertaken on the previous local plan where only 34 responses were received. Of the responses, 38% were received from residents of the district.
8. The following key themes and issues were frequently raised by respondents:
 - **Housing:** concerns were raised over the need for housing, particularly affordable housing. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on the need to provide housing for locals and young people, particularly in the context of an ageing demographic
 - **Green space:** highlighting importance of access to local green space via public transport and active travel. The need for increased sports provision catering for all ages and genders was referenced. Additional sports pitches/courts and play areas were frequently suggested, in addition to the need for an even distribution throughout the district

- **Transport:** need for a joined up public transport network, linking various modes of transport. Frequency and reliability, particularly in smaller settlements, was a common theme
 - **Infrastructure:** the need for improved infrastructure provisions within the transport, healthcare, utilities, and education sectors were commonly noted, in addition to a desire to see increased recreational greenspace
 - **Climate change:** responses noted the need for flood risk management and mitigation, and the value of nature-based approaches to this. Sustainable drainage and tree planting were also frequently mentioned
 - **High Streets:** reduced business rates were a common suggestion, in addition to reducing vehicle traffic on high streets and suggested improvements to public realm
 - **Protecting the unique context of the New Forest:** throughout responses, there was a common theme of protecting what makes the area special including the National Park, Cranborne Chase National Landscape, historical environment, and local communities
9. Overall, many respondents indicated that a focus on housing need and provision ought to be a priority for this review. Particularly, the need for a mix of affordable housing, under both the NPPF definition of affordable housing and ensuring that housing was generally affordable for those wishing to purchase. Representations also sought that new housing is provided near employment and services. Tied to this, many respondents felt that there was a need to improve infrastructure, services, and facilities to support new development.
 10. Another common priority raised was ensuring that our natural environment is suitably protected in the context of new development. In addition to this, the need to prepare for, and mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change was also frequently raised by respondents.
 11. There was also a common theme raised by many that the needs of current local people and communities should be prioritised in the Local Plan Review. There was a strong consensus for the Plan to focus on town centre regeneration and development on brownfield sites before looking to greenfield (and Green Belt) sites.
 12. A number of statutory bodies also responded to the consultation, and the responses are summarised in the table below. It is important that officers continue with duty to cooperate meetings and enter into Statements of Common Grounds with these bodies over the coming

months to it ensure that the council and others work together on strategic, cross-boundary issues to create effective and sustainable policies.

Statutory Body	Main themes raised in comment
Natural England	Biodiversity and nature recovery, and the need for a strategic approach to this
National Highways	Infrastructure preceding large-scale growth and cumulative impacts
Environment Agency	Key topics included flood risk, groundwater resources, river basin and coastal management.
Historic England	Protection of historic assets and responding to climate change.
New Forest National Park Authority	Environmental mitigation, responding to climate change, and development impacts on NP character.
Other neighbouring local planning authorities	Unmet need, the importance of strong and collaborative cross-boundary working, and consideration of higher density development.
Town and parish councils	Key topics raised included affordable housing, healthy communities, town centre regeneration and infrastructure and service provision.

13. A number of key landowners also made comments on the plan and are engaging with the council to bring sites forward. Over the coming months, officers will engage with landowners to understand site aspirations and ambitions, although at this stage any negotiations will not necessarily mean that this will lead to a site allocation.
14. A detailed summary of the consultation carried out to date is attached to this report as appendix 1. This includes a summary of the activities carried out, the responses received and the recommended response to those issues. As the Local Plan progresses it will be important that the responses received are considered and that the plan can show how they have been addressed.

Update on evidence base and technical work

Evidence base

15. As previously reported, a full up-to-date, technical, and robust evidence base will need to be produced to inform the preparation of the Local Plan Review and to demonstrate that future policies, targets, and requirements are justified and deliverable.
16. Alongside the Issues and Scope consultation officers have been progressing several evidence base studies, which will be finalised over the next year. Evidence based studies that are currently being produced include housing needs assessment, Green Belt study and a Sustainability Appraisal. As studies are completed, they will be published on the council's website as part of the evidence base document library.

Revised Local Development Scheme

17. The current LDS, setting out the planned work programme for the preparation of the Local Plan Review, was agreed in October 2024 and states that the "Council intends to hold an early consultation in early 2025 on the issues the Local Plan review should cover and its scope. This will be followed by consultation on a full draft of the Local Plan review in Autumn 2025".
18. Since the publication of the LDS, there has been significant policy changes from the Government relation to the planning system, identifying and addressing housing need and wider devolution and local government reorganisation.
19. Given the above, it is considered necessary to prepare a revised work programme as set out below. This work programme will continue to be kept under review as work progresses on local government reorganisation.
20. This revised programme recommends a further consultation in late 2025) seeking views and feedback on different spatial growth and policy options. This high-level consultation, provided for under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012, would not be a full detailed local plan (which is not an absolute requirement at Regulation 18 stage). The consultation will be on a more general document, with areas of potential growth being illustrated on high level maps with limited, if any preference on any one area.
21. These spatial options will be formed based on the submissions to the call for sites in late 2024 and early 2025, further officer-led research and Sustainability Appraisal work.

22. In terms of the policy direction, this will focus on the emerging themes and principles that will shape the detailed planning policies in the Local Plan. At this stage, the council will not be finalising policies but rather seeking feedback on the direction they should take.
23. This revised programme still allows for a consultation on the Regulation 19 plan, which is the final draft of the plan that the council intends to submit to the Secretary of State for independent examination, in Autumn 2026 ready for submission by the end of 2026.

Options Appraisal

24. Other options, including that of continuing with the currently approved Local Development Scheme, have been considered. However, but due to the significant amount of work that is required to respond to the challenges identified above, this is now considered unrealistic.

Conservation Area appraisal review

25. **Heritage assets** are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner that is appropriate to their significance so that they can be used and enjoyed for future generations. Conservation area appraisals are a useful tool that can be used to understand and manage change within areas defined for their heritage assets.
26. There are 22 conservation areas in the New Forest Plan Area. They range from a small farmstead to larger areas of more than a square mile. Our conservation areas include historic town centres such as Lymington and Ringwood, and whole villages in the Avon Valley and Downland areas.
27. Some of the appraisals were prepared some time ago and need to be reviewed to ensure continued compliance with current national and local policies, plans, and guidance.
28. As assessment of the current conservation areas in the Plan Area has been carried out by officers and is set out in Appendix 3. The assessment considers the time since the area was last reviewed, recent and potential future development, and management pressures leading to possible changes to the character and appearance of the conservation areas and their setting.

29. Following this assessment, the two areas that scored the highest (and therefore most in need of review) are Eling and Breamore.
30. These initial reviews are proposed to be undertaken internally by the council's conservation team and are anticipated to take approximately 8 months to prepare.

Corporate plan priorities

31. The Corporate Plan 2024-28 outlines the vision, values, and priorities for the council over the next three years.
32. The vision of the Corporate Plan is to secure a better future by supporting opportunities for the people and communities we serve, protecting our unique and special place and securing a vibrant and prosperous New Forest. This has been organised into the thematic areas of People, Place and Prosperity. The local plan aligns with all the objectives of the Corporate Plan and the recent Issues and Scope consultation document was drafted by grouping together the various topics under the headings of the Corporate Plan.

Consultation undertaken

33. Within the council, the Local Plan Member Working group continues to meet and has actively engaged in discussions on the key issues and updates on the evidence base studies. An officer working group also meets to discuss key issues and emerging findings. Externally, there are also regular meetings with adjoining authorities and key partners to discuss planning matters relevant to plan making, including cross boundary issues such as development needs.

Financial and resource implications

34. In February 2025, Cabinet approved an initial budget of £700k for the Local Plan Review which is being used for evidence-based studies. In early 2025, the council were additionally awarded £70k towards undertaking a Green Belt study and £227k towards progressing the Local Plan in the current system by December 2026.
35. The timetable for this submission is tight and the team are likely to rely on external consultants to undertake some of the background work and policy writing where possible.

Legal implications

36. None. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004 provides the legislative framework which requires that councils should prepare a local plan and keep it up to date.

37. Under Section 71 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 the council has a duty to formulate and publish policies for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas within the district. Additionally, under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the council has a duty to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. Such proposals include conservation area appraisals and management plans. It is expected that the council will consult when the proposals are at a draft stage in line with best practice and as outlined in the 'Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management' by Historic England.

Risk assessment

38. None.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

39. An up-to-date Local Plan is essential if the council is to stay in control of the planning of its area and ensure a high-quality environment.

Equalities implications

40. None directly from this report

Crime and disorder implications

41. None directly from this report

Data protection/ Information governance/ ICT implications

42. Local Plan engagement, including public consultation, requires the collection and processing of some personal information in a manner compliant with GDPR.

New Forest National Park/ Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

43. The New Forest National Park Authority are required to produce and review their own local plan. The timetable proposed by this council is broadly in line with that of the National Park Authority. Where possible the council is looking to maximise opportunities for joint working on evidence studies.
44. There were no specific implications identified in the recent Issues and Scope consultation document for the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. However, as part of the further preparation of the Local Plan, the council will need to consider how the Local Plan will further the purposes of the National Landscape.

Conclusion

45. The Local Plan Review is being undertaken at a time of profound change for the planning system, particularly in relation to the provision of housing and devolution. However, the government is clear with its continued commitment to the plan-led system and expectation that plans will be delivered quickly.
46. The revised timetable enables the council to move forward quickly to ensure that it can maintain an up-to-date local plan, aligning with other projects and allowing more time later in the process to prepare a sound Plan.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Summary of responses from Statutory Consultees

Appendix 2 – Revised Local Development Scheme

Appendix 3 – Conservation area appraisal review

Background Papers:

None