

Cabinet - 4 February 2026

Local Plan Review – Approval of Spatial Options and Policy Direction Document

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>This report presents the draft Regulation 18 Spatial Options and Policy Direction consultation document for Cabinet approval.</p> <p>The document outlines the council’s emerging spatial strategy and policy direction for the Local Plan Review, following the Issues and Scope consultation held in 2025.</p> <p>The Regulation 18 document sets out 15 Strategic Development Growth Options (SDGO), draft policy themes, and strategic priorities aligned with the Corporate Plan. It incorporates feedback from public engagement, Member Working Group input, and emerging evidence base studies.</p> <p>This report seeks Cabinet approval for the publication for public consultation. The proposed period for consultation is to run from 6 February 2026 to 20 March 2026, using a combination of digital platforms, roadshow events, and stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>This consultation is a key milestone in preparing a sound and deliverable Local Plan, ensuring the council maintains an up-to-date planning framework in line with national expectations.</p> <p>Cabinet is also asked to delegate authority for final editorial adjustments prior to publication and note the ongoing publication of the evidence base alongside the Plan.</p>

Recommendations	Cabinet is asked to: 1. Approve the Regulation 18 Spatial Options and Policy Direction document for public consultation; 2. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Place, Operations and Sustainability, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to make any final editorial or formatting changes prior to publication; and 3. Note that there will be an emerging evidence base published alongside the consultation, as referenced in the Regulation 18 document.
Reasons for recommendation	To allow the council to move forward to the next stage of consultation for the Local Plan review
Ward(s)	All wards outside the National Park
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Derek Tipp – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy
Strategic Director(s)	James Carpenter – Strategic Director for Place, Operations and Sustainability
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Introduction

1. This report seeks approval to publish the 'Regulation 18 Spatial Options and Policy Direction' consultation document and to undertake public consultation from 6 February to 20 March 2026 in line with the adopted Local Development Scheme. The document, as currently drafted, is at Appendix 1 to this document.
2. In late October 2025, the council temporarily paused consultation on the Local Plan Review until there was clarity about the end date for the government's consultation of proposed Local Government Reorganisation. Following confirmation that this consultation would end on 11 January 2026, a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) was approved in December 2025. This sets out the following programme for preparation of the Local Plan Review:
 - Public Consultation on 'Spatial Options and Policy Direction' ('Regulation 18') – February-March 2026
 - Proposed consultation on the published Local Plan review (regulation 19) - Autumn 2026.
 - Submission of Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination – December 2026.

Background

3. As previously reported, the council commenced its Local Plan Review in 2024, with an Issues and Scope consultation, and Call for Sites exercise, taking place in early 2025. A revised Local Development Scheme (work programme) was approved in August 2025, setting out key milestones including Regulation 18 consultation in Winter 2025/26 and Regulation 19 publication in Autumn 2026.
4. This Spatial Options and Policy document builds on feedback received during previous consultations, emerging evidence, together with Officer and Member Working Group input. It is structured around the Corporate Plan themes of People, Place, and Prosperity.
5. The Government's consultation on a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), launched on 16 December 2025 with responses due by 10 March 2026, proposes measures to accelerate housing delivery and economic growth through a stronger presumption in favour of development, higher-density housing near transport hubs, and streamlined biodiversity net gain and viability processes. It also reduces the weight of out-of-date local plans, increasing reliance on national policies and the risk of speculative applications contrary to local objectives. These changes, alongside support for infill and brownfield intensification, pose significant challenges to protecting the New Forest's unique character and environmental sensitivity,

making swift adoption of the Local Plan essential to mitigate the tilted balance of the revised NPPF. If the Local Plan is submitted before December 2026 for examination, it will be examined against the current NPPF, however officers will continue to review the progress of this consultation and will make representations accordingly.

Key Content of the Regulation 18 Spatial Options and Policy Direction Document

6. The Spatial Options and Policy Direction document sets out New Forest District Council's emerging thinking on the Local Plan Review for the area outside the National Park, covering the period 2025–2043. It builds on earlier consultation and outlines a draft vision, revised objectives, and a range of spatial options for growth. The document identifies key challenges including demographic change, environmental constraints, and national policy reforms. It proposes a framework for sustainable development that balances housing need, infrastructure delivery, climate resilience, and protection of the district's unique character.
7. A central focus of the document is the identification of Strategic Development Growth Options (SDGOs), which include potential new settlements and major extensions to existing towns and villages. These options will be assessed against environmental constraints such as Green Belt, flood risk, and proximity to international nature conservation sites.
8. The document also explores the implications of national planning reforms, including the potential introduction of "Grey Belt" land and the requirement to further the purposes of National Parks and National Landscapes. It explores a proposed spatial strategy that may combine multiple options to meet housing and employment needs in a sustainable way.
9. The document includes emerging policy directions across a wide range of themes, including housing mix and affordability, biodiversity net gain, climate change adaptation, infrastructure planning, and economic development. It considers updated approaches to rural housing, commoning and back-up grazing land, and port-related development, particularly in relation to the Solent Freeport and Solent Gateway 2. The document also aims to embed health and wellbeing, high-quality design, and green and blue infrastructure into future development.

Spatial options for the distribution of growth

10. Even with a combination of all options, it is considered unlikely that the housing need identified through the standard methodology set by government will be capable of being met in the plan period. It should be noted that failure to demonstrate a robust and deliverable strategy for meeting our housing need, without a demonstrable and justified case, does risk the Local Plan being found unsound at examination. This is particularly the case if the Inspector is not persuaded by the adequacy of our supporting evidence.
11. Informed by the interim site assessment work undertaken to date on both larger and smaller sites, officers have identified 15 different Strategic Development Growth Options (SDGOs) for consultation. The SDGOs have been defined based on sites (or groupings of sites) which have either been promoted to the council by developers or landowners or are areas that have been identified by officers as being of merit at this stage to explore further for their potential strategic growth opportunities. In the context of this Local Plan Review, SDGOs are being defined as areas that may have potential to accommodate 100+ dwellings, as opposed to the smaller sites that cover the range 10-99 dwellings.
12. An initial assessment of the options has been undertaken using the framework set out in the Interim Sustainability Appraisal (SA). This is a mechanism for considering and communicating the effects of an emerging plan, and alternatives, with a view to minimising adverse effects and maximising the positives. Is it a requirement for local plans. The Interim SA will be published alongside this Regulation 18 consultation and concludes that all options are associated with both positive and adverse effects and no option stands out as performing well or performing poorly overall.
13. It is important to note that further work will be undertaken to assess these options in more detail in the light of responses to this consultation and other technical studies in the coming months. The final SA Report will be published for consultation alongside the final draft plan later this year, and it must present an appraisal of "the plan and reasonable alternatives" with a particular focus on appraising "significant effects".
14. At this stage it is also important to highlight that these simply represent different options for assessment – they are not proposed site allocations, nor this prevent any other sites not included at this stage to come forward in due course.

Development Need

15. To fulfil the government’s priority of boosting the supply and delivery of housing, the NPPF requires local authorities to calculate the housing need for their area using the government’s ‘standard method’. Using this method, the overall housing need for New Forest District is 1,511, but based on Planning Practice Guidance and local affordability factors, the need for the Local Plan area can be calculated at 1,254 dwellings. However, it should be noted that any deviation from the standard method, including the application of local adjustments, would need to be robustly justified and tested through the Local Plan examination process.
16. As of 1 April 2025, the existing housing supply in the Plan Area considered to be realistically deliverable/developable by 2043 is 6,835 dwellings, as set out in the table below.

Source of supply	Number of dwellings
Strategic Site Allocations	4,959
Other Permitted Large Sites (10+ dwellings)	214
Permitted Small Sites (1-9 Dwellings)	285 (10% discount applied)
Contribution to housing supply from permitted sites for Use Class C2 care homes	114
Non-permitted developable Local Plan Part 2 (2014) allocations	162
Small Site Windfall Allowance	1,101 (Informed by past trends demonstrating reliability of supply)
Total	6,835

17. Based on work undertaken to date, there may be a potential new supply of 6,747 dwellings (if all potential sites are concluded to be suitable, available, achievable and capable of delivering dwellings within the Plan period to 2043) that might be developable in the Plan period. In addition of the existing supply, this could mean a potential total supply of 13,582 dwellings. However, at this stage this potential figure is far from certain and further assessment will be required before any conclusions can be made on the suitability and achievability of potential sites.

18. Nevertheless, even if every potential supply/site source currently identified were to be concluded as suitable, available and achievable in the Plan period, there would still be a significant current projected shortfall of at least 8,910 dwellings between the potential housing supply for the period 2025-2043 and the current standard method housing need over that period. This is before considering any unmet need from the New Forest National Park Authority and neighbouring authorities.
19. Our Economic Needs Assessment identifies a gross employment floorspace need of up to 142,600sqm (which equates to a land take need for around 34ha of employment land) for general employment uses for the period 2025-2043. The indicative employment need is further broken down into a need for up to around 25,790sqm office floorspace (a land take need of around 4.3ha of land) and up to around 116,810sqm industrial floorspace (a land take need of around 29.4ha of land). It is currently considered that it can be possible to meet this need through a combination of existing supply and if some additional allocations as part of SDGOs in appropriate locations are proposed. It is important to note that this need is outside that potentially needed for Port uses.

Public consultation arrangements

20. In line with our adopted Statement of Community Involvement the Regulation 18 consultation will run for 6 weeks from 6 February 2026 to 20 March 2026. We will invite views on all aspects of the plan including the draft vision, spatial options, and policy directions, and will use this input to refine its strategy ahead of the preparation of the final 'Regulation 19' version of the Local Plan which is expected to be published in late 2026.
21. As previously reported, and with particular awareness of the sensitivities of Local Plan preparation, consultation arrangements and key lines of messaging will be confirmed in an updated communications plan. This plan will be prepared by officers across the communications and planning policy team, with regular input from senior managers. Consultation will include engagement with town and parish councils and key stakeholders. Officers are also arranging consultation events at a number of locations offering the public a chance to ask officers questions on the proposals. Officers will once again use specialist digital engagement software (Go Vocal) to seek views on the document.

Corporate plan priorities

22. The Corporate Plan 2024-28 outlines the vision, values, and priorities for the council over the next three years.
23. 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 document proposed for public consultation has been drafted by grouping together the various topics under the headings of the Corporate Plan.

Options appraisal

24. Since work began on the Local Plan review, there has been significant policy changes from the government in relation to the planning system, identifying and addressing housing need and wider devolution and local government reorganisation.
25. While the outcomes of the local government reorganisation are yet to be known, the government has made clear that local authorities must continue to progress their Local Plan reviews to ensure plans remain up-to-date and responsive to local needs. This Local Plan is being prepared in that context, and any future changes to governance arrangements will be considered as part of the ongoing plan-making process. The scope for pausing/slowing work on the Local Plan Review has regularly been explored with a clear message being received by Cabinet to continue at this time.
26. Given the above, the work programme will continue to be kept under review as work progresses on local government reorganisation.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

27. The potential for local government reorganisation, presents a strategic consideration for the Local Plan Review, particularly if a boundary change scenario is pursued by the Government. While the outcomes of LGR remain uncertain, it is important to acknowledge that any future changes to governance structures could affect the spatial coverage, policy direction, and decision-making responsibilities of the Local Plan.
28. Officers will continue to monitor developments and advise on whether the emerging Local Plan remains the most appropriate mechanism for delivering the Council's strategic planning objectives. These risks will be kept under review throughout the plan-making

process and reflected in future updates to the Local Development Scheme.

Consultation undertaken

29. Work on the Local Plan review has been, and continues to be, discussed with relevant officers, including via the Officer Working Group and with Members through the Member Working Group and Cabinet Members.
30. Alongside this, officers have engaged with statutory consultees and infrastructure providers to understand the implications of the emerging spatial options. Further consultation with external stakeholders will continue to take place at the formal consultation stage.
31. With particular regard to engagement to the New Forest National Park Authority, who are preparing their local plan to similar timescales, there is regular officer engagement between the planning policy teams to ensure that the respective plans and evidence base are prepared with appropriate understanding and referencing to each other.

Financial and resource implications

32. Sufficient existing budget provision has been made to cover work on the Local Plan review, including a grant of circa £200k from MHCLG in late 2024 to progress the Local Plan review with an ambition to submit for examination by December 2026.
33. Alongside the Local Plan review, a number of town and parish councils are progressing neighbourhood plans. These plans place a statutory requirement on the council to engage with neighbourhood planning groups and also meet specific deadlines for facilitating consultations and, ultimately, referendum. An additional dedicated officer resource to help facilitate this is currently being put in place.

Legal implications

34. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local authorities to prepare and maintain an up-to-date Local Plan.
35. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduces new duties to further the purposes of National Parks and National Landscapes. The Government has indicated its intention to introduce national Development Management policies, which will be considered as the Local Plan progresses.

Risk assessment

36. None directly arising from this report. However, the Local Plan is identified in the service risk register with a number of key risks identified.
37. Specific risks about not having an up-to-date local plan include that without an up-to-date Local Plan, decision-making may default to national policy (NPPF), weakening the council's ability to resist speculative or inappropriate development.
38. Additionally, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) and the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) underpin a new streamlined system. Plans submitted by December 2026 can proceed under the current system whereas plans not submitted by then must be prepared under the new system, potentially starting from scratch with the 30-month timetable.
39. A further risk relates to the preparation of neighbourhood plans and the increased number that are coming forward in the light of both LGR and planning reforms. Officers continue to review this work in relation to resource to ensure that appropriate time is given to align with the local plan work.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

40. The environment is one of the three pillars of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), alongside economic and social objectives. The Local Plan is a key vehicle for delivering the council's climate and nature recovery aspirations, embedding policies that support carbon reduction, climate resilience, and biodiversity enhancement.
41. By proactively planning for environmental outcomes, the council can remain in control of development across its area, ensuring that growth is aligned with high-quality placemaking and long-term sustainability. This is essential not only for meeting statutory and national policy expectations, but also for safeguarding the unique environmental assets of the district.

Equalities implications

42. None directly from this report. However, whilst there is no statutory requirement to produce a formal Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) for the Local Plan, the council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. This requires due regard to be given to the potential impacts of the Local Plan on people with protected characteristics.

43. The NPPF reinforces this expectation by promoting inclusive planning that addresses the needs of all sectors of the community. Preparing an EqIA is therefore considered good practice, helping to demonstrate compliance with legal duties, support inclusive policy development, and reduce the risk of legal challenge during examination.

Crime and disorder implications

44. None directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

45. Local Plan engagement, including public consultation, requires the collection and processing of some personal information in a manner compliant with GDPR. Collection of data, and its use, is contained with the [Planning Policy privacy notice](#). How data is collected and used will also be made clear on the Go Vocal platform during the consultation.

New Forest National Park / Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

46. There is an inherent tension between the scale of housing growth required to meet identified housing need, through the Government's standard method, and the statutory requirement to further the purposes of the New Forest National Park, particularly where development pressures risk undermining landscape character, biodiversity, and opportunities for quiet enjoyment. This conflict could constrain the ability of the Local Plan to align with the National Park Authority's objectives, especially if mitigation measures are deemed insufficient or incompatible with the Park's special qualities.
47. With respect to the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, a suggested option for some limited additional growth is explored that would be in keeping with the area, with a view to its settlements being able to function in a sustainable manner. The topic of furthering the purposes of the National Landscape in this context is explored in the document and supporting evidence.

Conclusion

48. The Local Plan Review is progressing in line with the adopted timetable and national expectations. The Regulation 18 consultation document provides a clear and structured basis for public engagement and policy development.
49. It is proposed that Cabinet approve the recommendations to allow officers to proceed with consultation from February to March,

enabling the council to maintain momentum and prepare a sound and deliverable Local Plan.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Regulation 18
Spatial Options and Policy Direction
document

Background Papers:

None.