

NEW LOCAL PLAN: PROGRESS UPDATE AUGUST 2022

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress with the New Local Plan and set out next steps in the progression towards the Preferred Options stage.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The latest plan-making timetable adopted by the Council on 20 July 2021 identifies the key milestones for the development of the Council's new Local Plan. These documents must be underpinned by robust, proportionate evidence, including technical studies, which the Strategic Planning team are responsible for commissioning, project managing and, in some cases, undertaking, ensuring they comply with relevant guidance and are based on appropriate, robust information.
- 2.2 This report highlights progress made on the development of policy documents, key evidence and other work tasks within the Strategic Planning team's remit.

3 LOCAL PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

New Local Plan

- 3.1 The most recent adopted Local Development Scheme (adopted 20 July 2021) set a timetable for the preparation of the Council's new Local Plan, including envisaged dates for future stages of public consultation.
- 3.2 This Local Development Scheme envisaged a Regulation 18 consultation (the Spatial Options stage) taking place across Summer/Autumn 2021, which occurred, with a further Regulation 18 consultation (the Preferred Options Stage) taking place in Spring 2022, which did not occur. A revised Local Development Scheme will be presented to Members of the Planning Policy Sub-Committee at the nearest opportunity in order that a revised timetable can be agreed for the delivery of the next stages of plan-making.
- 3.3 Since the conclusion of the Spatial Options stage, the Strategic Planning team have considered all the comments received, logged them on the consultation portal and produced a feedback report which is the subject of a separate report into this meeting of the Planning Policy Committee.
- 3.4 The next formal stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan is the publication of the Preferred Options stage for formal consultation. This stage goes beyond the broad options reported in previous consultation documents to indicate what the Council feels is the most appropriate course of action with relation to policies. Crucially this will also indicate the preferred strategy

option(s) for the scale, location and type of new development to come forward through the new Local Plan.

- 3.5 The Preferred Options stage needs to be informed by a comprehensive evidence base. This evidence base is the key determinant for the timetable for the preparation of this Stage and hence the future programme is structured around the delivery of this evidence base.
- 3.6 The Preferred Options stage also needs to be informed by a robust strategy and site selection process. When examined in public, the Council will be expected to demonstrate that its strategy for accommodating housing, job and other needs is appropriate and sustainable, both in relation to scale and location. A framework for agreeing the appropriate strategy and site selection process will need to be developed and it is expected that this will be presented to a future meeting of the Planning Policy Committee in Autumn 2022. This strategy and site selection framework will, however, need to be informed by a more advanced evidence base that is currently available and hence there is an interdependency between the timetable for development of this evidence base and the Council's ability to advance its strategy and site selection framework. Progress will continue to be reported into the Planning Policy Committee in a similar format to that provided by this report.
- 3.7 Through the Spatial Options consultation and beyond, the Council has begun to explore long-term options for how the District may beneficially change over the next 30 years beyond simply identifying land for housing and jobs. This includes:
- Developing more sustainable and 'complete' communities by using growth to create new infrastructure, plug holes in existing infrastructure capacity and improving sustainable access (e.g. walking, cycling, sustainable travel) to key facilities
 - Considering how best to move towards net zero from the earliest opportunity, including identifying appropriate locations for renewable energy generation and making best use of modern methods of construction and modular buildings, with the potential for local housebuilding (e.g. factory model) and renewable off-grid or 'energy positive' buildings
 - Prioritising brownfield, part-brownfield and contaminated land in site selection as a preference over greenfield sites to minimise the loss of agricultural and other beneficial land
 - Protecting the District's agricultural heritage and supporting the move towards modern methods of agriculture and local self-sufficiency

- Laying the foundations for long-term economic growth in order to secure inward investment, create high-quality local jobs and reduce the local dependency on out-commuting to areas such as London

3.8 A significant amount of progress has been made on the technical evidence since the conclusion of the Spatial Options stage. An update on progress with specific evidence documents is reported separately within this report below.

Update on Evidence Base

Completed Evidence

3.9 As set out in previous updates, a wide range of evidence base documents have already been completed to inform the new Local Plan. These include:

- Green Belt Assessment
- Landscape Character Assessment
- Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Local Wildlife Sites Review
- Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)
- Urban Capacity Study
- Initial Transport Appraisals
- Grow-On Space Study
- Green and Blue Infrastructure Study
- Various Needs Assessments

3.10 It may be necessary or prudent to undertake refreshes of some of these documents prior to the submission of the new Local Plan for examination. The need for such refreshes will be kept under review.

3.11 An Open Space Study has also recently been produced which is the subject of a separate report into this meeting of the Planning Policy Committee.

Refresh of 'Needs' Evidence

3.12 Since the conclusion of the Spatial Options stage, a comprehensive refresh of 'needs' evidence has been commissioned. This includes updates to:

- South Essex Housing Needs Assessment – to better understand the need for different types and tenures of housing over the next 20 years (e.g. affordable housing, housing for older people etc.)
- Economic Development Needs Assessment – to better understand the need for different types of employment land over the next 20 years (e.g. industrial, offices etc.)
- Retail Needs Assessment – to better understand the need for different types of retail land over the next 20 years (e.g. comparison shopping, convenience shopping etc.)
- Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment – to better understand the need for additional pitches for Gypsy and Traveller householders over the next 20 years

3.13 This needs evidence will be concluded by the end of September 2022 at which point the Council will have a refreshed understanding of the long-term need for different types of development with which to inform the future stages of plan-making.

3.14 This evidence will be reported into the Planning Policy Committee when completed.

Other Evidence

3.15 There is a range of other key evidence base documents that need to be prepared to both inform and support the preparation of the Preferred Options stage. In many cases, initial work has been produced however more detailed and robust assessments are now required to support a more detailed stage of Local Plan preparation.

3.16 This evidence is expected to be commissioned in Autumn 2022 and completed in Spring 2023. A summary and update of this evidence is provided below.

- Transport Assessment – the Transport Assessment will allow for the impacts of different growth scenarios to be modelled and for the necessary mitigation to support those scenarios to be considered. A fuller position on options for progressing this work is set out in a separate report into this meeting of the Planning Policy Committee.
- Viability Assessment – the Viability Assessment will allow for the financial implications of the Council's preferred policies to be considered to ensure that the Local Plan as a whole will be deliverable

- Infrastructure Delivery Plan – the Infrastructure Delivery Plan will allow for the infrastructure necessary to deliver the new Local Plan to be identified, costed and phased
- Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment – once the Council has a firm strategy in mind, a Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment will allow for a detailed assessment of the flood risk of future development sites to ensure they will be safe for their lifetime

South Essex Strategic Framework

- 3.17 The Strategic Planning team are continuing to support the preparation of a non-statutory joint planning framework for South Essex (the ‘South Essex Framework’). As explained in previous reports, the South Essex Framework would be a joint document covering the authority areas of Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend and Thurrock. It would set overarching principles for how the sub-region will grow and develop in the future and address how key cross-boundary challenges and opportunities, delivering joint ambitions for the area will be delivered. It will not replace Local Plans as the key delivery vehicle for local growth and infrastructure but rather act as a tool for achieving added value from each individual authority’s Local Plans.

Wider Workstreams

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

- 3.18 The Council consulted on minor changes to its adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in 2021. These minor changes were identified as part of the obligatory five-year review of such documents required in legislation.
- 3.19 It is now proposed that these minor changes, along with a small number of other changes, are adopted into a revised SCI which is the subject of a separate report into this meeting of the Planning Policy Committee.

Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2022-23

- 3.20 The Council is obliged by law to prepare a monitoring report that assesses the performance of the Council’s planning policies. Although the requirement to publish these reports annually has been removed, it remains the Council’s practice to prepare annual reports on a financial year basis.
- 3.21 The Council’s AMR for 2022-23 is in the process of being finalised and is expected to be published in September 2022.

Brownfield Register

- 3.22 The Council is also obliged by law to maintain and update annually a register (the 'Brownfield Register') of brownfield sites that are considered to be suitable and available for residential development.
- 3.23 Regulations set out further criteria that must be met in order for sites to be eligible for the register, including a minimum size and conditions around their planning status.
- 3.24 An update to the Council's Brownfield Register is currently being prepared and is expected to be published in August-September 2022.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Government has made clear that it expects all local authorities to prepare a Local Plan by the end of 2023. Whilst it is unlikely that the Government would intervene in local authorities that are at an advance stage by this date, such as having published a Submission Version of their Local Plan, there remains a risk of intervention in local authorities who are deemed to be making insufficient progress in preparing a Local Plan by this date. This intervention could include removal of planning powers or appointment of a third-party to fulfil the Council's duties on its behalf. Monitoring and reporting on progress is a key component of advancing the Council's Local Plan to an advanced state before the end of 2023. Similar reports will continue to be presented to the Planning Policy Committee to advise on progress and a fuller Local Development Scheme update will be prepared in Autumn 2022 which will detail timetable and resourcing risks in greater detail.
- 4.2 The Council has a range of legal duties relating to the preparation or publication of certain documents. This report sets out the position on the preparation or reviews of these documents, including the AMR, Brownfield Register and Statement of Community Involvement.

5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This progress update is not considered to have any direct environmental implications.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Strategic Planning team's work programme is being achieved through existing agreed budgets and resources.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are none arising from this report.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as no decision is being made.

9 RECOMMENDATION

9.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

(1) To note the Local Plan Progress Update August 2022 as set out in this report.



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Background Papers:-

None.

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