REPORT FROM THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 LOCAL PLAN TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

1.1 Pursuant to Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rule 15(c) Cllrs R Lambourne, A H Eves and L J Newport called-in the decision made by the Executive on 13 June 2022 in respect of the Local Plan Transport Assessment.

1.2 A copy of the report to the Executive is appended to this report.

1.3 At its meeting on 6 July 2022 the Overview & Scrutiny made the following recommendations for the Executive's consideration:-

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Executive give consideration to enable the Planning Policy Committee to explore options for using a company other than Ringway Jacobs.

2.2 That the Local Plan Transport Assessment be considered by the Planning Policy Committee.

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REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 13 JUNE 2022

PORTFOLIO: STRATEGIC PLANNING

REPORT FROM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT

SUBJECT: LOCAL PLAN TRANSPORT ASSESSMENT

1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

1.1 That a Local Plan Transport Assessment be commissioned using an allocation of up to £200,000 from the dedicated LDF reserve.

1.2 That the Assistant Director, Place and Environment, in liaison with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Planning, be delegated authority to oversee the delivery of the Local Plan Transport Assessment and report on its progress to the Executive.

2 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

2.1 The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan for the District for the period to 2040. Local Plans must meet defined tests of soundness in order to be adopted. One of these tests of soundness is that the Plan must be justified by technical evidence.

2.2 A Local Plan Transport Assessment allows for the impacts of different growth strategies to be modelled in terms of their impacts on key junctions and routes and to identify the mitigation necessary to make those strategies acceptable in planning terms. It is therefore important that a Local Plan Transport Assessment is commissioned in a timely and effective way to ensure that the Council's new Local Plan is soundly prepared and that its strategy is sustainable.

3 SALIENT INFORMATION

3.1 The Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan, which will set the growth strategy for the District to 2040.

3.2 The early stages of the development of a transport evidence base have comprised a high level assessment of spatial options undertaken by Mott MacDonald using spreadsheet models, which cannot capture congestion impacts. Their findings of mapping analysis undertaken to consider the sustainable accessibility of site locations provides an indication of sustainability but is not sufficiently robust to determine a short list of spatial options to take forward to highway impact appraisal.

3.3 The Council must therefore commission a detailed and robust transport assessment to consider the impacts of different strategy options and to inform the Council's selection of its preferred growth strategy.

3.4 Essex County Council, as the strategic highway and transport authority, is the ultimate arbiter of the efficacy of a highway impact appraisal. It uses its partner Jacobs to do this work on its behalf. Jacobs is the owner of the South Essex Transport Model which has been specifically designed for the Essex highway network. This places them in a unique position compared to instructing another consultant as:

- The alternative consultant would need to prepare their own model or pay Jacobs for the right to use data from the South Essex Transport model, which is highly likely to result in higher costs and longer timeframes; and

- The alternative consultant would need to have their work reviewed by Essex County Council (which would still use Jacobs) which is highly likely to result in higher costs and longer timeframes.

3.5 The methodology proposed by Jacobs has multiple stages, as set out below.

1) Sustainable Accessibility Appraisal (Updating of Mott MacDonald Initial Mapping Study)

3.6 This would provide evidence to support the selection of spatial options to take forward to highway impact modelling. The mapping would typically involve determining the distance between development sites and key destinations such as transport hubs, education and health facilities, employment and retail centres etc. This would help appraise the level of opportunity for promoting active travel modes as sites would also be mapped alongside bus and rail routes to determine the level of access to public transport.

3.7 Specifically, for this study the mapping work undertaken by Mott MacDonald as part of their early-stage appraisal of sites contained within their September 2021 Options Assessment Report will be reviewed and updated. Focus will be placed on undertaking an additional assessment of the sustainable accessibility of sites particularly linked to the highway network. Additional mapping analysis to complement that aspect would be used to score sites against different accessibility criteria and would consider both the existing and potential sustainable accessibility of sites.

Deliverable: An addendum to Motts MacDonald's report detailing the mapping and findings of the supplementary sustainable accessibility appraisal to support the work undertaken by Mott MacDonald as detailed in their Options Assessment Report.

2) Assessment of Spatial Options

3.8 This would provide evidence to support the selection of a Preferred Spatial Option to take forward for further assessment as part of the Regulation 19 Pre-Submission version of the Local Plan. It is envisaged that no more than three spatial options would be considered for the initial modelling.

3.9 For the comparative impact assessment of spatial options, it is envisaged that fixed demand modelling would be undertaken. This would provide a more cost-effective assessment of highway impact at this stage. Strategic modelling using the South Essex Transport Model would initially determine the strategic impact of development trips on network capacity in the District as well as the wider South Essex area.

3.10 Where strategic modelling identifies network issues, junction modelling would be undertaken to determine the local impact of development trips on junction capacities in the District. This would supplement the outputs from the South Essex Transport Model.

3.11 The assessment would involve the development of a future year 'reference case' in 2040 with background growth assumptions and committed developments and schemes applied. A 'do-minimum' scenario would then be developed with the addition of Local Plan development trips. Infrastructure improvements associated with the adopted Local Plan would be included in the reference case and 'do-minimum' scenario.

3.12 Model outputs and analysis provided for the assessment of spatial options would include strategic network assignment analysis, journey time delaysand junction capacity analysis.

3.13 Cross-boundary impacts on neighbouring authorities would be considered through an assessment of the change in traffic flow on key routes into and out of the District, as well as highlighting the distribution of traffic from key developments with a likely cross-boundary impact.

Deliverable: A report detailing the modelling methodology and findings of the highway impact appraisal of the spatial options (reference case and do-minimum scenario).

3) Assessment of a Preferred Spatial Option

3.14 This would provide evidence to support a Preferred Spatial Option as part of the Regulation 19 Local Plan Pre-Submission and Examination in Public.

3.15 Junction modelling would be undertaken to provide a two-tier assessment of the wider impact of Local Plan development trips across the road network in the District and neighbouring authorities, as well as the capacity impact on key local junctions.

3.16 Should a need be identified for the evidence base to include microsimulation modelling, the assessment would be expanded to three tiers, with the additional modelling of vehicle movements through urban centres and/or major interchanges using modelling software.

3.17 Variable Demand Modelling (VDM) would be adopted at this stage to better assess any expected shift to public transport services in the District. The assessment would involve the remodelling of a future year 'reference case' in 2040 utilising VDM. A 'do-minimum' scenario would then be remodelled with the addition of Local Plan development trips, also accounting for variable demand mode shift.

3.18 Junction capacity outputs would highlight the level of 'unmet demand' present in the 'reference case' and 'do-minimum' scenarios. A comparison between the two scenarios would present the volume of 'unmet demand' at junctions following the addition of development trips post 2040. A sensitivity test of peak spreading in junction models (where appropriate/developed for the purposes of the study) would then be undertaken to determine the impact of development traffic across an extended peak period.

3.19 It is recognised that VDM modelling would account for an element of mode-shift towards public transport. The expected level of demand on public transport to avoid possible network congestion would therefore be modelled as part of the 'reference case' and 'do-minimum' modelled scenarios. Along with consideration of peak spreading described above, the findings presented in the reporting of Local Plan impact would therefore present a more realistic, contextualised picture of future network conditions from which to consider mitigation.

3.20 Cross-boundary impacts on neighbouring authorities would again be considered through assessing the change in traffic flow on key routes into and out of the District's administrative area, as well as highlighting the distribution of traffic from key developments with a likely cross-boundary impact. This purpose will be well served with the use of the model covering a wider South Essex area and analysed by the team experienced in modelling other transport interventions across the wider area.

Deliverable: A report detailing the modelling methodology (inc. VDM) and findings of the highway impact appraisal of the Preferred Spatial Option (reference case and do-minimum scenario).

3a) Review of Mitigation

3.21 This would involve a review of findings from the capacity analysis undertaken in the South Essex Transport models and local junction models as part of the assessment of the Preferred Spatial Option. Where Local Plan growth is shown to cause capacity issues at junctions, possible mitigation would be considered in two forms:

a) Small-scale improvement measures at junctions and/or revisions to capacity improvement designs already proposed as part of the adopted Local Plan - where feasible.

b) Improvements to existing and proposed public transport and active mode infrastructure and services across the District . This would tie in with schemes and initiatives promoted through the Rochford District Cycling Action Plan, Bus Back Better etc.

3.22 Junction improvement mitigation would be assessed quantitatively using local junction capacity modelling. High level design input would be required to assess the outline feasibility of proposals and to produce basic scheme drawings. However, no detailed design work or feasibility appraisal would be considered as part of the study.

3.23 Improvements to public transport and active mode infrastructure and services would need to be assessed qualitatively, albeit with acknowledgement of the level of 'unmet demand' to be accommodated.

3.24 There is currently no expectation that new large-scale junctions or link road mitigation would need to be considered as part of the Local Plan evidence base. However, a sensitivity test could be modelled in to review the impact of A127 corridor improvement schemes in a 2040 future year. This would form the basis of a 'do-something' modelled scenario.

Deliverable: A report detailing the modelling of junction mitigation and A127 schemes as well as the findings of the qualitative assessment of public transport and active mode mitigation.

4) On-going Support in Run-Up to Examination

3.25 The final element of this study would involve the reviewing of modelling-based representations made during public consultation on the pre-submission Local Plan, the preparation of any supplementary evidence-base material to support the Plan through examination (e.g. content for Topic Papers), as well as attendance at the hearing sessions.

Deliverables: TBC – but to include technical notes with commentary on representations. Content for Topic Papers etc.

3.26 Jacobs has indicated that they can provide an initial 'Preferred Options' report within 4 months which would allow for a consultation on that document before the end of 2022 in line with the Council's current timetable. Further reporting would then follow in 2023 to support the consultation on the submission version of the Council's Local Plan, with further support at Examination of the Plan.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Failure to prepare a robust transport assessment is likely to lead to the Council's new Local Plan being found unsound at Examination which would lead to a delay in the ability to adopt a new Local Plan for the District as well as resulting in wasted expense and resource.

4.2 The Council is not obliged to use Jacobs to undertake this assessment however as the owners of the existing South Essex Transport Model, they are uniquely positioned to undertake robust, detailed transport modelling of potential growth options as part of the Council's new Local Plan. Jacobs have prepared a number of similar studies across Essex, including for Basildon and Chelmsford Councils. Use of an alternative consultant would require that consultant to either prepare their own modelling, which would involve additional time, expense or duplication, or to pay to access the South Essex Transport modelling which would require the Council to pay both consultants for their time.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Commissioning a robust transport assessment will support the development of a sound Local Plan and in doing so will help to avoid the risks that may arise from not having an up-to-date Local Plan, including greater exposure to unplanned or speculative development and reputational damage from loss of planning powers.

5.2 The assessment will involve a significant amount of technical work over an 18-24 month period. There may be risks of timetable or budget slippage within this period. However, these risks will be avoided and mitigated through close project management and regular reporting of progress to the Executive.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This decision will have no direct impact on the environment or greenhouse gas emissions.

6.2 Indirectly, a sound Local Plan allows for the environmental impacts of planning decisions to be better understood and for those impacts to be better reflected in decision-making. Commissioning a transport evidence will support the development of a sound new Local Plan and will allow for more informed decision-making with respect to the environmental impacts of new development, particularly relative to unplanned development which may arise from a failure to adopt a sound Local Plan.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Council has earmarked a dedicated reserve (the LDF reserve) to fund technical work on the new Local Plan. This assessment would be funded from an allocation of that reserve.

7.2 A reprofiling of the reserve budget shows that the assessment can be funded from this reserve without the need for additional funds to be made available.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are none directly arising from this report.

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and found there to be no impacts (either positive or negative) on protected groups as defined under the Equality Act 2010.