



Report to Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Date:	9th December 2021
Title:	Buckinghamshire Local Plan update
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Gareth Williams
Contact officer:	Darran Eggleton/Ian Manktelow
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	To note the progress and current issues in relation to the Buckinghamshire Local Plan
Reason for decision:	To ensure the Committee is kept up to date with the progress of the Plan.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report is prepared in order to provide an update on the progress of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan to the Growth Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 As Member's will be aware the Council is starting preparation of the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan. This report updates the Committee on progress to date on the Plan and the current issues concerning the preparation of the Plan.
- 2.2 The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire by April 2025. More importantly, however, the Plan provides a major opportunity to shape the growth of Buckinghamshire over the next 15 years or so. The Plan will complement the work of the Buckinghamshire Growth Board on the Vision for Buckinghamshire and also the Recovery and Growth Proposal, setting out the spatial vision and proposals for the growth of the area up to 2040. It will also be critical to the day to day planning application decisions that the Council as planning authority takes, as once adopted (or significantly progressed)

the Local Plan is the prime consideration in those decisions. It shapes in detail not just where development takes place but also the quality of the development and secures the infrastructure (or funding for infrastructure) to support it.

- 2.3 Previous reports to members and member briefings have highlighted the significant uncertainty that the current Planning reforms create in the preparation of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan. Those uncertainties are heightened at present as the Government reviews the reforms that will (and won't) be included in the Planning Bill that was announced in the last Queen's Speech.
- 2.4 We want to make good progress with the new Plan but there is also a risk of undertaking abortive (and costly) work. Originally it was intended that the Planning Bill would be published towards the end of the year, but it seems this is unlikely to happen although we anticipate some kind of response from the government 'this winter', although there are no formal indications of any revised timescales. Once published, it will take a significant amount of time for bill and for secondary legislation to progress through parliament, and for national planning policy and guidance to be revised.
- 2.5 As such work has been focusing on putting the building blocks in place for when the new system starts, as the much faster timetable for preparing local plans (if this element of the Planning White Paper is taken forward) will mean we will need to "hit the ground running" to prepare and independently examine a plan within 30 months from start to finish. Key areas of work undertaken include:
- Agreeing the Local Development Scheme – the work programme for the Plan
 - Preparing a Statement of Community Involvement setting out how people can be involved in planning, including the preparation of local plans. (The final version of this is due to the go to Cabinet in December 2021).
 - A brownfield call for sites – seeking suggestions for new brownfield development to consider as part of the Plan so we can optimise the level of brownfield development proposed in the Plan.
 - Early dialogue with council members around some key themes, notably around brownfield development, regeneration, and density and quality.
 - Getting our systems right, including a new system for consulting the public as we prepare the Plan.
- 2.6 We now want to engage more widely with communities and stakeholders on the key issues for the Plan. This started at the end of November. This will include a questionnaire survey seeking views on the key issues that should shape the Plan. This will be available online and publicised with the intention of reaching people who don't usually get involved in plan making. The survey will be publicised on the website, in social media and at local libraries. Hard copy comments will also be accepted so that the engagement is inclusive. The survey will be highlighted to key contacts at on-line events in December and January. The close date for comments will be extended to mid Feb so that there is a good opportunity for people to get involved. This work will be accompanied by a second call for brownfield sites to ensure

we capture as many potential brownfield site opportunities as possible before considering other options.

- 2.7 We would encourage members to participate in both the questionnaire survey and the brownfield call for sites, and to encourage their communities to also get involved too. Two all Member briefing sessions are planned for 6th December 2021.
- 2.8 Looking ahead, despite the uncertainty, in 2022 we will start developing in earnest the extensive evidence base required for a local plan. Initially this will focus on understanding and developing the range of site options for how we meet the development requirements of our area, both housing and other forms of development. We will also commence a number of other areas of technical work. In addition, whilst we have the current local plans system (and potentially under any new system), it is important to continue to develop dialogue and collaboration on strategic planning issues with other local authorities and key agencies to ensure that the Council can satisfy the statutory “Duty to Cooperate”.
- 2.9 Perhaps the most fundamental strategic planning issue affecting the Plan will be the proposals that will emerge for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc. The Government proposes to introduce a Spatial Framework for the Arc which will have the status of a National Planning Policy Statement. This is the same status as the National Planning Policy Framework. One of the tests for preparing a local plan is that they are “consistent with national policy”. As such the content of the Spatial Framework will be a very important consideration in developing the Local Plan. The Government recently consulted on “Creating a Vision for the Oxford - Cambridge Arc” and the Council submitted a substantial response to that consultation.
- 2.10 The longer term programme for preparing the Buckinghamshire Local Plan will depend on the outcome of the planning reforms and in particular the content of the Planning Bill and subsequent changes to national planning policy. As is often the case with major legislative or policy change, there may well be transitional provisions, and careful account will need to be taken of these when they are available. The Council will need to be prepared to be flexible and adapt its approach to how it prepares the Plan going forward.
- 2.11 It is suggested that a further report is brought to this committee when there is greater certainty around the Planning Bill and other elements of the planning reforms, to consider their implications for the Buckinghamshire Local Plan.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 Not applicable at this stage.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 There is considerable uncertainty about the legal basis for preparing the Buckinghamshire Local Plan going forwards. At present local plans have to be prepared within the legislative framework provided by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the relevant associated regulations, but this may change.

- 4.2 A budget of £750,000 per year for 4 years has been identified to fund the preparation of the Plan. Only a small amount has been spent to date, but this will increase significantly in 2022 as work on the technical evidence base increases.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 There are wide ranging corporate implications of preparing the Local Plan. It provides the opportunity to provide the spatial expression of the Council's Vision for Buckinghamshire. It also provides the opportunity to embed issues of climate change mitigation and sustainability into our planning decisions through the development of new policies and proposals. There may well be implications for the Council's property assets too.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 The report highlights that we are about to commence a period of early engagement on the Plan and members are encouraged to participate in that and encourage members of their community to get involved too.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 The report refers to early engagement already carried out and further engagement due to commence at the end of November.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 To commence a period of early engagement on the issues for the Plan and start developing the more detailed evidence base for the Plan.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 Buckinghamshire Local Development Scheme

<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/local-development-plans/local-development-scheme/>

Creating a Vision for the Oxford - Cambridge Arc

[Closed consultation overview: Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

National Planning Policy Framework

[National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)