



Report to Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Date:	13 April 2022
Title:	Buckinghamshire Local Plan update
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Gareth Williams
Contact officer:	Darran Eggleton/John Cheston
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 Members will already be aware the Council has started 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 As previously reported to this Committee, the Council has a statutory duty to prepare a new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire and adopt it 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 takes as the planning

authority, 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, member briefings and this committee have highlighted the significant uncertainty that the current Planning reforms have created in the preparation of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan. Those uncertainties were previously heightened as the Government began to review the reforms that will (and won't) be included in the Planning Bill that was announced in the last Queen's Speech.
- 2.4 Following a Government Cabinet reshuffle in September 2021, The Right Honourable Michael Gove MP became The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (previously known as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government). This change in key personnel within the Government's Cabinet has created further uncertainty as to the level of change expected to the planning system and has resulted in further reviews.
- 2.5 Originally it was intended that the Planning Bill would be published towards the end of the 2021, and whilst we anticipated some kind of response from the Government last winter, no formal indications of any revised timescales were announced. The current understanding is that there will be Government announcements about changes to the planning system in 'Spring 2022' – although there are no further details of when exactly this may be, if this time scale will be met or the level of change that will result. We also understand that the extent of the proposed reforms will be less significant than those envisaged by the Planning White Paper published in August 2020. Furthermore, that they will be included, together with other proposed changes, within a Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill rather than a dedicated Planning Bill.
- 2.6 However, once published, it will take a significant amount of time for a bill and for secondary legislation to progress through parliament, and for national planning policy and guidance to be revised to align with the new legislation.
- 2.7 In the meantime, we want to make good progress with the new Local Plan but there is also a risk of undertaking abortive (and costly) work as such work continues on the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire, putting building blocks in place for when the new system starts.
- 2.8 The following key areas of work have therefore been undertaken:
 - Agreed the Local Development Scheme – the work programme for the Plan.
 - Adopted a Statement of Community Involvement - setting out how people can be involved in planning, including the preparation of local plans.
 - Undertaken an initial call for brownfield sites – this consultation ran from 16th February to 6th April 2021 and sought suggestions for new brownfield development sites to consider as part of the Plan so we can optimise the level of brownfield

development proposed in the Plan. This consultation produced the submission of 275 sites which will be considered accordingly.

- Early dialogue with Council members around some key themes, notably around brownfield development, regeneration, density, quality, climate change and environmental matters
- Getting our systems right, including implementing a new system for consulting the public as we prepare the Plan (OPUS).
- Commenced a second call for brownfield sites. In order to fully explore and maximise our brownfield development sites we are running a second consultation. This was launched on 6th December 2021 and will remain open for as long as possible. So far this has gleaned a further 47 sites which will also be assessed as appropriate.
- Undertaken an Attitudes Survey as part of the ‘Discovery and Exploration’ phase of the Local Plan.

- 2.9 In order to engage widely with communities and stakeholders on the key issues for the Plan we undertook the aforementioned Attitudes Survey as part of the ‘Discovery and Exploration’ phase of the Local Plan.
- 2.10 This Survey was available online and publicised with the intention of reaching people who don’t usually get involved in plan making. The survey was publicised on the website, in social media and at local libraries with hard copy comments accepted so that the engagement was inclusive.
- 2.11 The Survey produced 3,439 responses, which is a very healthy response rate at this early stage in the plan’s preparation and it shows a keen interest in local planning and plan making in Buckinghamshire.
- 2.12 The responses received are being analysed and a summary of the analysis will be shared with Members and the public in due course. The responses received will help shape the objectives, direction and content of the plan going forward.
- 2.13 Looking ahead, despite the uncertainty, 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 are operating under the current local plans system (and potentially under any new system), it is important that we 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”.
- 2.14 Members will likely be aware that the Government appear to have all but abandoned the idea of introducing a Spatial Framework for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, which if implemented, would have had the status of a National Planning Policy Statement.
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2.15 The longer term programme for preparing the Buckinghamshire Local Plan will ultimately depend on the outcome of the planning reforms and in particular the content of the Levelling Up and Regeneration 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.

2.16 It is suggested that a further report is brought to this committee when there is greater certainty/understanding around the forthcoming Bill and other elements of the planning reforms, to consider the 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 2022/23 as work on the technical evidence base increases and as and when the aforementioned planning system changes are announced.

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 have undertaken early engagement on the Plan and we will be publicising the summary of the responses received in due course.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

7.1 The report refers to early engagement already carried out.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 To continue with the Brownfield call for sites, analyse the sites already put forward and to analyse the responses to the Attitudes Survey. To undertake a call for greenfield sites around May/June 2022 as the supply of new homes from the brownfield sites is likely to fall short of what will be needed over the plan period.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 Buckinghamshire Local Development Scheme
National Planning Policy Framework

10. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 10.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone [] or email []

