

## ENVIRONMENT AND LIVING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 October 2012

**PRESENT:** Councillor Hunter-Watts (Chairman); Councillors Adams, Mrs Bloom, Bond, Mrs Brandis, Cashman, Fealey (Vice Chairman), Foster, Hughes, Mrs Russel, Stuchbury, Vick and Winn. Councillors Edmonds and Mrs Paternoster attended also.

**Apology:** Councillors Mrs Chapple and Mrs L Smith.

### 1. VALE OF AYLESBURY PLAN

The Vale of Aylesbury Plan (VAP) would guide the development of the District through to 2031. In the light of changes to the planning regime it was being produced in separate parts and this first part covered the strategic policies. Once the Strategy part had completed its statutory process, the Development Management (VAP Delivery) and if needed allocations policies would be prepared.

The submission of this Plan would need to be agreed by Council and at their meeting on 9 October, Cabinet would be asked to recommend this to Council for the meeting on 17 October.

The Plan had been prepared in accordance with the decisions of Cabinet on 14 August 2012 which covered the accelerated production of the Strategy Document, as well as the level of jobs and homes growth and the apportionment of that growth across the District to be used as the basis of VAP work.

In preparing the Plan, account had to be taken of relevant international, national, regional, and local policies. A list of all the plans and policies that had been considered during the preparation of VAP were included in the Sustainability Appraisal. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in March 2012 had replacing the majority of previous national planning guidance in Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance notes. VAP and the policies had been prepared in conformity with the NPPF.

VAP was in 'general conformity' with most of the policies in the South East Plan, which still remained in place. However bearing in mind that the South East Plan was based on broad data across the region, and that some evidence was now several years old, the VAP had been based on robust local evidence, where available, that was more detailed and up-to-date. In particular there was more up to date and robust evidence now available about the housing needs for Aylesbury Vale.

With the introduction of the Localism Act in 2010, and the Government's confirmed intention to revoke the South East Plan, the Council commissioned a review of the housing needs of the district. The Aylesbury Vale Housing and Economic Growth Assessment (GL Hearn 2011) identified the needs for new jobs and homes to 2031 to meet the existing and future needs of people in the District.

At its meeting on 14 August, Cabinet received a report which reviewed the consultation responses and considered options for narrowing down the options for further work on the Strategy elements of VAP. That report looked at the "bottom-up" input to the process from parish and town councils, at the District-wide position, in particular the Housing and Economic Growth Assessment mentioned above, as well as the broader issues which extended beyond the District's administrative

boundaries. Cabinet's decision, including the levels and distribution of growth across the District, had shaped the drafting of the Plan.

Sustainability appraisals had been carried out at each stage of the development of the VAP strategy document. The production of VAP has also been supported by a number of technical studies. Some of these were part of the previous work on the Core Strategy while others had been commissioned as part of the on-going work since the Core Strategy had been withdrawn. These would be published on the website as part of the pre-submission publicity. In addition to the Housing and Economic Growth Assessment, these included:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment Validation study,
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.
- Employment Land review update.
- Water Cycle Strategy update.
- Leisure and Cultural Facilities Study.

A VAP Members' forum had been held on Monday evening to provide Councillors with a further opportunity for briefing and answering any queries on the approach being taken in the Plan or on the processes involved.

In response to the changing planning regime, and Members wishes that the strategic elements of VAP were progressed in an accelerated timescale to respond to the NPPF transitional arrangements, the overall Vale of Aylesbury Plan would now come forward in sections as follows:

- Vale of Aylesbury Plan – Strategy – the current document – setting out the vision, strategic objectives, jobs and housing targets, along with apportionment across the District, and the principles of how development should take place in terms of delivering infrastructure, economic growth, housing, environmental protection and the localism agenda. No site specific allocations would be made, nor would detailed Development Management policies be included. The document, in effect, replaced the strategic elements of the South East Plan.
- Vale of Aylesbury Plan – Delivery (Development Management) – this document would set out development management policies for the entire District which, taken together with the current Strategy document, would provide a completely updated planning policy picture. As far as possible, this element of the Plan will be worked on in parallel with taking the Strategy document through its formal processes. It was hoped that consultations on the content could take place in the first half of 2013.
- Allocations – New allocations were only anticipated to be required at the Strategic Settlements – Aylesbury (pending Development Management decisions), Buckingham, Haddenham and Winslow and possibly some of the larger villages. Some of these could be developed by neighbourhood plans (led by Town /Parish Councils) or through locally focussed planning documents (led by AVDC working with local communities). Smaller scale sites, consistent with the policies of the Strategy document, were likely to come forward through the Development Management process. Gypsy and Traveller allocations would be dealt with by a specific development plan document led by AVDC.

Understanding this staged approach would hopefully assist Members in focussing any comments they had on the Strategic aspects of VAP rather than other components that will come forward subsequently. Members should also be aware of the guidance that our Plans should not repeat what is already set out in the NPPF.

Moving forward, if the Plan was agreed for submission by Council then there would be the need to finalise documents and supporting material, before embarking on a statutory pre-submission publicity period. It was hoped that this could be completed before the end of the year, when people can comment on the soundness of the Plan. The Council would then need to summarise and collate all of the representations received before submitting all of this for independent Examination by the Planning Inspectorate. If the Inspector found that the Plan was “sound” at inspection the council would be able to adopt it and at that stage it would become part of the statutory Development Plan.

The Council’s work on the VAP had assumed the revocation of the South East Plan (SEP), in line with the stated intention of the Government. If this happened it would leave a gap in terms of housing numbers and require AVDC to produce its own up-to-date assessments of jobs and homes growth for the District. However, the SEP remained in place and was part of the statutory Development Plan. There was a clear tension here between the Government’s strong pressure on Authorities to progress rapidly with their plan-making activities and their commitment to move away from “top-down” dictated growth with the tests an Inspector will have to apply in judging the soundness of the plan. Other Authorities were currently in the examination process in somewhat similar situations (including Milton Keynes Council) and AVDC would keep a close watching brief on their position. If the Government fail to deliver on their stated intentions then this could have timescale implications or require a revision to the explanatory text and other supporting material at submission or pre-submission publicity stage. This was a key issue on which we would need to take specialist legal advice after the current democratic processes have been completed and could possibly alter the narrative and presentation of the Plan in this respect.

Members requested further information and were informed:-

- (i) that the VAP housing allocations figure was approximately half of those required in the current SE Plan. The Planning Inspector would have to rule whether these housing growth figures were acceptable. VAP had been put together on more detailed, up-to-date and robust local evidence the housing needs for Aylesbury Vale, when compared to the broad regional data used in the SE Plan.
- (ii) Spatial Vision – that while the location of the Silverstone University Technical College had moved and would now be sited in Northamptonshire, it remained but was only a very small part of the whole Silverstone development. The facilities and other development taking place at Silverstone as a whole were supporting jobs and opportunities for Buckingham businesses.
- (iii) Policy VS7 (Timely delivery of housing) – that Neighbourhood Plans dealing with growth in localities would not be able to come forward until the Council had a statutory Development Plan (VAP) in place. Community-led non-statutory planning documents would be used as material considerations in assessing proposals for developments in their areas, provided they had followed government guidelines for local approval including consultation, and were consistent with the VAP.

- (iv) Policy VS7 (Timely delivery of housing) – that the VAP needed to explain how infrastructure would be delivered. If the level of required strategic infrastructure necessary to support economic growth was not being delivered then the Council would need to look at other ways that the infrastructure might be funded.
- (v) Table 2: Housing requirements – that a judgement had been made for Winslow to accommodate 400 additional homes to 2031, on top of the projected supply to be delivered from existing commitments as at March 2012, plus completions in 2011/12. This was 200 houses more than had been promoted by the Town Council through the “bottom-up” approach.. However, the additional housing growth would be conditional and linked with the development of East-West Rail and the new railway station in Winslow.
- (vi) that Officers would ensure that the colour and readability of some of the text in the VAP, as detailed at the meeting, was improved in future versions.
- (vii) that the importance of providing an Aylesbury eastern link road was recognised by the County Council (as the highways planning authority). It was likely that this infrastructure would only be provided for on the back of development.
- (viii) Policy VS4 (Employment Growth) – that it would be important for the future that business growth and infrastructure was the driver for housing growth. The Council’s Economic Development Strategy and team would be taking a lead in this regard, but would also be working with the Planning Department.
- (ix) Policy VS9 (Affordable Housing) – that while the VAP set targets for affordable housing, achieving those levels would have to take into account the viability of proposed developments. Further details about the calculation of viability and implementation of this policy would be provided in VAP Delivery Policies or Neighbourhood Plans.
- (x) that there were 3 aspects to the delivery of housing over the period until 2031:-
  - a. broad phasing across the period, recognising the importance of large schemes commencing early as they would need to build out over time.
  - b. stating how the delivery of housing would be monitored.
  - c. in the case of a significant shortfall in meeting the figures then the Council would need to go back and review the policies.
- (xi) that if Neighbourhood Plans did not come forward in a timely manner to add local detail including allocations then VAP might need to fill the policy gap.
- (xii) that if there was a significant shortfall in housing delivery than VAP might need to consider bring forward sites from later phases in the plan period.
- (xiii) that it was for developers to provide an A41-A413 road link between Berryfields and Weedon Hill. This would hopefully come forward in future years in line with the Section 106 agreement.
- (xiv) Policy VS3 (Securing the delivery of infrastructure to support sustainable communities) – that the Council tried to ensure that the provision of infrastructure was linked directly to the phasing of developments and in line with growth. However, where this was not possible then a pragmatic approach was taken that it was better to have infrastructure provided for later in the development’s implementation than not at all.
- (xv) that a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) conducted as part of the evidence for the Local Development Framework had identified sufficient land for over at Winslow.

- (xvi) that SHLAA looked at strategic settlements and ruled out unsustainable areas such as flood plains and biodiversity areas before making an assessment of sites that might have potential capacity and be theoretically deliverable.
- (xvii) on policies relating to the quality of design in new developments.
- (xviii) that the issue of the provision of fast broadband access across the whole of the District was being addressed in other work being done by the Council, but was identified in VAP infrastructure work.

Some Members expressed their concerns, and stated that they were not happy with the evidence provided, or that it had not been more clearly expressed with reasons, for allocating the additional homes, as detailed in Table 2 at page 19 of the Committee report. In particular, this related to the additional 200 houses at Winslow and the rationale for providing them at Winslow rather than at another strategic settlement such as Haddenham.

Members also commented:-

- (a) Section 1 – Background (paragraph 1.13.4) – that they would like the ‘eight times the average income in 2011’ text in dot point 2 and the ‘3700’ in dot point 3 to be emboldened to emphasis these facts.
- (b) that there should be mention of the need for a Waddesdon “bypass” road and of the Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) at Waddesdon.
- (c) Spatial Vision – that the vision should also include a greater aspiration for the provision of better quality leisure facilities.
- (d) that work still needed to be done to improve the rail link between Aylesbury and London when, by comparison, it was possible to travel by rail from Tring to London in 35 minutes.
- (e) VS11 (Environmental and heritage assets, including green infrastructure) – that point A c) should be clarified to read, ‘The historic environment and heritage assets of national and local importance are preserved and enhanced through the identification, protection and/or appropriate management of: archaeological remains, conservation areas, historic buildings, historic parks and gardens, and registered landscapes.’
- (f) Part 3 (paragraph 3.21) – that the policy should look to ensure that only appropriate redundant agricultural buildings where able to be changed for business use.
- (g) Part 3 (paragraph 3.57) – that the sustainable construction of new developments should also be sustainable for local environments.

RESOLVED –

- (1) That the Chairman of the Environment and Living Scrutiny Committee be asked to report the comments and feedback from this meeting to the Cabinet meeting on 9 October 2012, in particular relating to the allocation of additional homes to 2031 in Table 2 of the VAP.
- (2) That any Members who had further particular points that they wished to be reported to Cabinet on 9 October should bring these to the attention of the Chairman and the Head of Planning in advance of the Cabinet meeting.