



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Report to the Transport, Environment and Communities Select Committee

Title:	The Growth Agenda
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Cabinet Member sign-off:	Cllr Mark Shaw

Purpose of Agenda Item

This item is for information only.

Background

This item was discussed previously by the Select Committee on 27th September 2016 and was to be discussed again on 6th December 2016 but was subsequently postponed until 7th March 2017.

Summary

The four Districts are working on Draft Local Plans for their area; Aylesbury Vale District Council and Wycombe District Council each have an emerging Draft Local Plan which is expected to be examined in public later this year and adopted in Spring next year. Chiltern and South Bucks District Council are working on a Joint Local Plan, currently at Preferred Options stage which is expected to be examined next summer and adopted towards the end of 2018. Buckinghamshire County Council is working with each of the Districts on their emerging Local Plans, from a non-statutory, County wide strategic planning role and a statutory role in terms of strategic transport planning, highways, strategic flood risk, minerals and waste planning, school place planning, health and well-being. Each of the emerging Local Plans is delayed due to uncertainty over housing numbers and weight given to the protection of the green belt arising from publication of the Housing White Paper on 7th February 2017. The purpose of the Housing White Paper is to accelerate housing growth as part of the government's ambition to deliver a million new homes by 2020 and reform the National Planning Policy Framework in relation to planning for housing, sustainable development and the environment. Currently each District anticipates a few months delay to the published timetable for the Local Plans. Meanwhile BCC continues to work with the

Districts on their evidence base, including the strategic flood risk assessment, infrastructure plans and transport strategies.

Role of Buckinghamshire County Council

The County Council has a statutory role for strategic planning as the County Highways Authority, County Transport Authority, County Flood Authority, County Education Authority and County Minerals and Waste Planning Authority and an obligation for joint working with the District Councils on their Local Plans. BCC as a statutory Authority has an influencing role over County wide strategic planning matters with each of the Districts as part of the duty to co-operate (Localism Act 2011) and a Public Health obligation to safeguard social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the County. Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) acknowledges the importance of a plan-led approach to managing housing growth and development within Buckinghamshire as part of County wide strategic planning and with adjacent County authorities as part of the England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance for increasing economic growth and productivity within the south-east of England.

The County Council also fulfils other functions which advise on planning proposals such as the County Archaeology service which maintains the Historic Environment Record, the County Ecology service which has responsibility for monitoring and protecting the natural environment including the maintenance of the Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre and ecological resource of the County and the Public Rights of Way service which has responsibility for the managing and maintaining the County's Definitive Map.

Summary of BCC's contribution to the draft Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan (VALP)

BCC responded to the Issues and Options consultation in 2015 and the Draft Local Plan consultation in 2016. BCC's responded to both consultations on the basis of consolidating growth around the strategic settlements rather than dispersing growth across the villages of Aylesbury Vale, in order to plan for sustainable housing growth and the strategic infrastructure investments needed to support new housing growth. BCC is actively working with all the Districts to plan for the strategic growth of Bucks strategically across all the local authority boundaries in Bucks, recognising the importance of safeguarding the green belt in the south of the County from inappropriate development. BCC recognise the important role of Aylesbury as the County town of Bucks and jointly manage the Aylesbury Garden Town initiative with Aylesbury Vale District Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership to masterplan the design and development of Aylesbury as a new Garden Town. BCC also recognise the strategic importance of Haddenham in the south of the Vale in terms of road and rail connectivity and Buckingham, to a lesser extent in the north of the Vale. The vision for the growth of Buckingham, led by neighbourhood planning, is supported subject to more detailed technical assessments of existing infrastructure capacity, clarity on potential schemes and deliverability of critical infrastructure investment. BCC is keen to promote strategic settlements within the M40 growth corridor, identified by the Local Enterprise Partnership for its strategic economic importance within the south-east and recognise the importance of housing growth at Haddenham to influence the routing of the proposed

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway around the north of Aylesbury. BCC recognise that no decision has been made yet on the new settlement option proposed in the Draft VALP. BCC remains committed to working with AVDC on the emerging Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan, a key focus of which is to identify strategic infrastructure priorities according to the emerging spatial strategy of the Draft Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan.

Aylesbury and Buckingham Transport Strategies

As the Strategic Transport Authority for Buckinghamshire, BCC is responsible for developing the county's transport policy framework and as such the production of Transport Strategies for key settlements. The Aylesbury Transport Strategy (ATS) and the Buckingham Transport Strategy (BTS) align with BCC's corporate commitments as set out in BCC's Strategic Plan (2015-2017). The Strategy ensures Aylesbury continues to be thriving and attractive during a period of unprecedented growth. If adopted, the ATS and BTS will feed into the VALP pre-submission draft, which AVDC plan to take to their Cabinet later this year. The ATS and BTS are designed to form part of the evidence base for emerging Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan proposals.

1. **The Aylesbury Transport Strategy (ATS) proposals** - The Strategy has six objectives which were inspired by relevant national, regional and local level policies and existing transport issues in Aylesbury. The objectives are designed to guide development of the strategy, including the assessment of the suitability of potential transport improvements, listed as follows -

- Improve transport connectivity and accessibility within Aylesbury Town.
- Improve accessibility to other urban centre and new growth areas outside Aylesbury.
- Improve journey time reliability.
- Contribute to improved air quality by minimising the growth in traffic levels and congestion.
- Reduce the risk of death or injury on the transport network.
- Make it easier and more attractive to travel by active travel and public transport modes.

The Strategy then uses a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to appraise the town's existing transport conditions and recommend transport improvements.

2. **Buckingham Transport Strategy (BTS) proposals** - has six objectives which were inspired by relevant national, regional and local level policy with reference to existing plans such as the Buckingham Neighbourhood Development Plan. The Strategy's objectives are listed as follows –

- Make it easier and more attractive to travel by active travel and public transport in particular within Buckingham.
- Improve transport access and movement in the town centre.

- Improve accessibility into Buckingham and to other urban centres / new growth areas.
- Improve journey time reliability.
- Minimise the impact of future growth on traffic levels, congestion and air quality.
- Reduce the risk of death or injury on the transport network.

The Strategy then assesses a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to appraise the town's existing transport conditions and recommend ideas around transport improvements.

Buckinghamshire County Council response to the Draft Wycombe Local Plan (WLP)

BCC have been working with WDC on the emerging Draft Wycombe Local Plan, which focuses growth on the reserve sites at High Wycombe, proposes an urban extension at Princes Risborough, development in the strategic settlements of Marlow, Bourne End and Wooburn and some development in the rural areas. Housing growth in Wycombe is constrained by Green Belt, AONB status, flooding or traffic issues so some unmet housing need will be exported to Aylesbury Vale where more land is available for housing development. The publication of the Housing White Paper has caused a slight delay in the timetable for the proposed WLP, pending more detail on housing numbers and implications for the proposed green belt releases. BCC support the proposed growth at Princes Risborough, due to its key strategic location within the M40 growth corridor and excellent north-south rail links. BCC highlighted the capacity constraints of the highway network at Princes Risborough and continue to work with WDC to deliver suitable mitigations including consideration of an alternative route to divert traffic away from Princes Risborough town centre. BCC have stressed to WDC that an alternative route through Princes Risborough has to be delivered at no financial risk to the County Council. BCC has been working with WDC on their Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan, particularly key issues of school place planning, strategic transport infrastructure, strategic flood management, housing for older people and waste management.

Buckinghamshire County Council response to the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan: Green Belt Preferred Options Consultation

Chiltern District Council (CDC) and South Bucks District Council (SBDC) are producing a Joint Local Plan and consulted on their Green Belt (GB) Preferred Options in the Autumn of 2016. Much of the land within Chiltern and South Bucks is constrained by Green Belt and / or AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) status which means some of Chiltern and South Bucks housing need will be exported to Aylesbury Vale, where available capacity exists. The Preferred Options Consultation draft Joint Local Plan proposed the removal of 15 strategic options from the GB, 5 of which BCC raised concerns about. BCC expressed GB policy concerns (mainly about sprawl and coalescence) about the removal of strategic green belt sites adjacent to Chesham, Little Chalfont, Chalfont St Peter, Holmer Green and

Hazlemere. Chiltern and South Bucks emerging Joint Local Plan is also under pressure from Slough to accommodate a further 5,000 houses of unmet need from Slough. Chiltern and South Bucks considered that none of the Green Belt sites on the border with Slough should be removed from the Green Belt. The Slough Issues and Options Consultation Document identified an area of search for the northern expansion into Buckinghamshire, the whole of which is in the Buckinghamshire Green Belt and some of the proposed sites are owned by the County Council. To date, Slough has failed to properly engage BCC on the proposed northern expansion into the County and other cross boundary matters. The areas of search generally perform poorly in terms of impact on highways and public transport provision. Furthermore, a northern expansion of 5,000 additional homes into Buckinghamshire will generate a need for a new primary school and a new secondary school as well as other education provision (such as the expansion of existing schools in the area and Chalfont Community College). BCC responded to the Slough Issues and Options consultation on this basis.

Key issues

- The Districts are at a critical stage in the development of their Local Plans and are anticipating further delay pending more detail on housing numbers and protection of the green belt as set out in the Housing White Paper. The Aylesbury and Wycombe Local Plans are expected to go their respective Cabinets in the Spring / early Summer of 2017 and public examinations to follow later in the year.
- Housing pressure in the south of the County particularly within Chiltern and South Bucks is putting pressure on Aylesbury Vale to accommodate unmet housing need. BCC are working with the Districts on a plan-led approach to meeting housing needs and managing housing growth within Buckinghamshire.
- Additional housing growth and increased population projections place additional demand on County Council services, particularly children's services, education services and adult and social care services but also transport strategy and highway teams, flood risk management, environment and ecology services, health and wellbeing.
- The Districts are also under pressure from emerging Government policies for economic growth, including the National Infrastructure Commission's ambition for an Oxford to Cambridge growth arc through Aylesbury Vale and Milton Keynes, including delivery of East-West Rail and feasibility funding for an Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. To the south of the County the Government is consulting on the Draft Airports National Policy Statement which sets out the need for additional airport capacity in the south-east of England and the case for Heathrow expansion. The Local Plans are not planning for anticipated growth arising from Heathrow expansion, which could have significant social, economic and environmental impacts on Buckinghamshire and adjacent authorities.
- BCC are working with the Districts to prepare a Strategic Infrastructure Plan for Buckinghamshire that would take account of national ambitions for growth within the Oxford to Cambridge growth arc, national infrastructure investment of East-West

Rail, a future Expressway and possible expansion of Heathrow, including the potential development of the Western Rail Link to Heathrow from Langley station.

Resource implications

No additional resource implications identified as yet.

Next steps

- BCC continues to work with the Districts on a plan-led approach to meeting housing need and critical infrastructure investment.
- BCC continues to comment on the publication of the District Local Plans as they advance through the final stages of public consultation and examination towards adoption.
- BCC will continue to work on an over-arching strategic plan for Buckinghamshire that takes account of wider growth pressures outside the scope of the District Local Plans and seek to influence the Government's aspirations for growth in this part of England.
- BCC will continue to work across services and with external agencies to develop an integrated, programme of investment to manage growth pressures affecting critical services and infrastructure across Buckinghamshire.