

UPDATE REPORT OF THE LOCAL PLAN TASK AND FINISH GROUP

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What is the Commission being asked to do?

To note the recent work of the Local Plan Task and Finish Group at its meeting of 1st August 2017, at which the Group considered the draft Local Plan prior to its recommendation to Cabinet on 18th September 2017. This update report outlines the Group's submission to the Cabinet Member for Planning and the Planning Service in respect of the Draft Plan; these submissions, recommendations and notes having been weaved into the Plan as to be presented to Cabinet for publication and submission.

Introduction

The Task and Finish Group 'Sweep-Up' Meeting took place on the 1st August 2017, after an 11-month interval. This was the concluding meeting of the series.

Members, under the chairmanship of Councillor Hugh McCarthy were: Cllr Alex Collingwood (Vice Chairman), Councillor Rafiq Raja, Councillor Miss Suzanne Brown, and Councillor Harry Bull.

The Meeting was supported by the Cabinet member for Planning; Councillor David Johncock, Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning; Councillor Alan Turner and the Chairman of the Planning Committee; Councillor Paul Turner.

The Meeting was addressed by planning officers; Mr Ian Manktelow (Strategic Planning Manager) and Mr Chris Schmitt-Reid (Team Leader Planning Policy), the Meeting was clerked by Mr Peter Druce (Democratic Services).

Executive Summary

The draft local plan was considered by the Group to be a sound, legible and logical document. It clearly addressed most of the pressing housing delivery issues, although the obvious constraints of the District were evident, and whilst largely recognised, compromise was evident.

The plan was comprehensive and generally clear on emerging policy, although some areas required detail refinement and greater clarity to improve lay readability. Members noted that the plan would not address existing infrastructure deficiencies, although it would ensure that the infrastructure needs of new development would be provided. There were stronger policies to ensure that developers met their obligations regarding the impact and harm caused by large scale development on established communities.

Members were impressed with the agreement to offset 2275 homes to AVDC (Aylesbury Vale District Council), noting that WDC (Wycombe District Council) will have more than met their sustainable obligations.

The sustainability of the plan was not clearly evident, stronger policy was required to guarantee delivery of truly sustainable development, however members noted that the sustainability appraisal was not yet published, which would address this aspect of the plan

Employment provisions, whilst difficult to define at an early stage, were thought to be about right and in balance with the housing growth agenda.

Members raised questions at the meeting which were answered by officers verbally, a list of comments were also submitted on the plan, which are covered by the officer's responses at **appendix A**.

Scope of the meeting

The scope of the Meeting had been established as follows:

To review and comment upon the Duty to Cooperate, including

- a) To examine the overall distribution, quantity and provision of new housing.
- b) To examine the plans provision for employment land and its economic provisions.
- c) To examine and comment upon the Memorandums of understanding within the wider duty to cooperate with adjoining authorities.

The implications for proposed sites and anticipated challenges

The wider Princes Risborough town expansion, including delivery and timing.

The overall timetable proposed within the plan and risks associated.

The "readability" of the plan document.

To prepare a report for the Review Commission meeting scheduled for the 13th September.

Process

The draft plan had to be prepared against a much reduced time table and had been severely impacted by continuous, and ongoing revision and additional planning requirements emanating from central government.

The plan was cross referenced to a considerable number of supplementary documents and policies, and built upon the earlier Site Delivery and Allocations Document of 2013, and most specially but not singularly the emerging Infrastructure Delivery Plan. These and many other footnote papers were not examined in detail, and it was felt may need further consideration.

The Planning officers gave an informative and helpful presentation to the Group, this is attached at **appendix B**.

The Local Infrastructure Delivery Plan is a large and complex document and is available as a web link at the Wycombe District Council website shortly.

Committee Comments and considerations.

In respect of the process timetable, Members acknowledged the very tight time table and the pressing need to meet the Cabinet approval date of the 18th September 2017; the 6-week statutory consultation period scheduled for early October 2017 and critically the submission to the planning inspectorate in March 2018. The March 2018 date was seen as critical because after that time it was expected that further even more demanding planning and delivery revisions were expected. These could prove difficult to incorporate within the plan and would be managed by subsequent plan updates.

Adoption was expected in early 2019, following the planning inspectors report.

This was based upon the assumption that the Plan was found to be sound by the Planning Inspectorate, and that there were no successful challenges by external agents.

Members Comments and observations.

During the meeting process members raised many points of detail and questions etc. as featured below. Additionally officers responded in writing to member's comments and these as said are appended to this paper.

- Soundness and legal compliance. Generally, the plan was thought to be most comprehensive and sound in its presentation of the case for significant strategic and housing development within the district up to 2033. Members considered that the plan had been positively prepared, was justified by government criteria, and would be effective over the plan period. Its consistency with the current version of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) was satisfactory. Some typographic and presentational corrections and improvements were recommended, especially to maps and cross referencing, so as to improve readability and clarity, these were acknowledged by officers.
- The plan was seen to have wide ranging and locally controversial consequences, especially where large development was proposed, and the Members noted that the draft infrastructure plan could not address the current infrastructure deficiency, but noted that there was work ongoing to minimise the potential impact of development, especially, but not exclusively, with regard to traffic congestion, topography and air quality. It was the Members' opinion that the District's assessed housing needs, whilst compliant with emerging government policy would not be adequately mitigated by the Infrastructure Delivery Plan. Members felt that this was not just a Wycombe centric issue; the wider impact of cumulative development was underestimated and constraining. Members requested more robust policy regarding the provision of s106 payment to prevent developers escaping the infrastructure needs of their development and its impact upon the locality.

- Members noted the officer's concerns regarding anticipated changes to government planning guidance and the need to have the Plan approved before these revisions were mandatory.
- The revised housing need was noted and accepted, and Members complimented the Cabinet Member and officers for their considerable work with AVDC regarding unmet need. It noted that the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) agreed that 2,275 homes would be taken by AVDC. The revised HEDNA (Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment) figures were noted and agreed. However greater clarity was needed on the actual housing numbers required, with some mathematical corrections required.
- The proposed release of Green Belt sites was considered most regrettable and whilst understood and accepted as essential for the District to meet its assessed housing need, it was felt that all other Green Belt searches had been exhausted. The release of the Glynswood site is regrettable and it potentially impacted on the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) and Hughenden Park, much stronger policy guidance (HW9) was needed and the plan would be adjusted to recognise this constraint.
- The large scale development of Princes Risborough, whilst reduced slightly in the plan period, was thought acceptable, although given the scale and impact upon the established community great care would be needed in the detail planning and delivery. However, given the extensive consultation and local engagement undertaken by officers, members were of the view that this was a sound and honest approach and it would make a substantial contribution to both housing delivery and the wider social and economic community of Princes Risborough.
- Members noted the use of town centre sites for intensive development, but felt that there was an opportunity for stronger policy for redevelopment at higher density of town sites and especially increased regeneration of run down areas, so as to reduce dependence of green field sites. Members commended the continued use of liaison groups where large sites were proposed.
- The spatial delivery of large scale housing was accepted as the best achievable but again concerns regarding infrastructure were noted. Work had been undertaken to refine delivery timetables and phasing, members expressed concern at the possibility of long drawn out development on multiple large sites if developers were slow to deliver.

- The small scale expansion of village sites, where appropriate and relevant was considered acceptable, but great sensitivity and local consultation with neighbourhood plans was needed at the planning stage, particularly in the rural areas and fringe villages where existing infrastructure was already inadequate.
- Community facilities were seen as a crucial part of plan making, the Plan recognised this under DM29. Members were concerned at the risk of ‘picking off’ small green spaces, village greens, allotments and local nature partnerships by speculative developers, recognising Paragraph 77 of the NPPF, and were reassured that there are existing policies in the Delivery and Site Allocations Plan, as well as a new Green Infrastructure policy in this plan – although the wording of that policy needed to be tightened up.
- The specific development policy for Marlow was noted and whilst in some respects locally controversial, given the constraints and limited opportunity within greater Marlow was generally felt appropriate and sensitive to the local character.
- Members regretted that care homes cannot be included in the housing count and noted that the greater provision of “living units” was being encouraged.
- Members voiced concern regarding the overall sustainability of the Plan. Although the underlying “sustainability appraisal” was outside the Task & Finish Group’s remit. It was however considered, that given the scale of development proposed over the life of the plan, a very clear link and reliance upon the document was a critical part of the delivery process.
- Generally, the employment policies were felt to be right and whilst concern was voiced regarding the potential for employment land loss to housing, it was accepted that it was difficult to predict need over the plan period.
- The heavy reliance on tables and schedules in the document was not user friendly, similarly some maps were unclear and of small scale, lacking contour details, this could be improved to assist readability.
- Members felt that whilst the plan did give significant recognition of the AONB and its vital relevance and importance to our District, with its cherished status; they noted that whilst there is a close working relationship with the AONB conservation board existed, it was nonetheless important to ensure that conservation policies were rigorously embedded within the Plan.

In conclusion all members were complimentary to the planning officers who had skilfully prepared the Plan, recognising the intense pressure and unpopularity of the process, it is a well drafted document that, subject to the above comments and recommendations could be recommended to Cabinet for approval. It was however to be noted that the Plan was dependent upon many supplementary papers and reports, many of which have not been examined in detail by Members.