



Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee agenda

Date: Wednesday 13 April 2022

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF

Membership:

D Carroll (Chairman), T Hunter-Watts, M Smith, A Baughan, Q Chaudhry, T Hogg, S Rouse, M Bracken, N Brown, S Chapple, I Darby, M Hussain, C Etholen, C Poll (Vice-Chairman) and D Town

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To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 17th February 2022 as a correct record.

4 Public Questions

Public questions is an opportunity for people who live, work or study in Buckinghamshire to put a question to a Select Committee. The Committee will hear from members of the public who have submitted questions in advance relating to items on the agenda. The Cabinet Member, relevant key partners and responsible officers will be invited to respond. Further information on how to register can be found here: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/your-council/get-involved-with-council-decisions/select-committees/>

Mr Chadwick has submitted the following question:

Could the Cabinet Member or Officers please confirm that all relevant policies within the new Buckinghamshire Local Plan will contribute towards the urgent goals of reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Would you agree that these considerations cut across many areas of policy, including, in particular, housing, transport, and environment, but others, too - and thus that a coordinated and coherent approach across the piece is required? What structures and expertise are in place within the planning policy team to achieve this?

In particular, given the significant number of new homes to be built, will you be looking to put in place policies to require Passivhaus (zero carbon) standards of energy efficiency by early in the Plan period, and if not, why not?

Mr Alan Thawley has submitted the following question:

Given that skills relating to the net-zero transition in construction will play an ever-increasing role in the economy, how is the council supporting local businesses to acquire these skills, either by ensuring that the relevant training is provided and accessible, or by supporting the growing market?

To this end, given that we have to date been unable to require developments to do more than meet the minimum requirements set by government through

planning, will the council commit to ensuring the developments it instigates itself (through Consilio Property, for instance or on council-owned land in Stoke Mandeville), will be required to be built to zero-carbon standards rather than vaguely promising to be 'energy efficient'?

5 Chairman's Update

6 Buckinghamshire Local Plan Update

10:20

17 - 22

The Committee will receive an update on progress with the development of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan.

Contributors:

Cllr Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

Darran Eggleton, Head of Service, Planning, Policy and Compliance

7 Levelling Up

10:50

23 - 30

The Committee will be updated on the Levelling Up White Paper and the implications for Buckinghamshire Council.

Contributors:

Cllr Martin Tett, Leader of the Council

Lisa Michelson, Service Director, Economic Growth and Regeneration

8 Work Programme

11:40

An opportunity for members of the Committee to suggest possible items for the future work programme.

9 Date of next meeting

The next meeting is provisionally scheduled for 14th July 2022 at 10am. All Council meeting dates will be confirmed at the Annual General Meeting of Council in May.

If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

For further information please contact: Kelly Sutherland on 01296 383602, email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

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Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee held on Thursday 17 February 2022 in The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF, commencing at 10.01 am and concluding at 12.30 pm.

Members present

D Carroll, T Hunter-Watts, M Smith, Q Chaudhry, S Rouse, M Bracken, S Chapple, I Darby and D Town

Others in attendance

S Ali, N Dicker, L Michelson, M Tett, J Towns, M Veryard, G Williams, M Winn and Richard Wood

Apologies

A Baughan, T Hogg, C Etholen and C Poll

Agenda Item

1 Apologies for Absence/Changes in Membership

Apologies were received from Cllrs Baughan, Etholen, Hogg and Poll. Members noted that Cllr Peter Brazier was attending in place of Cllr Poll.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9th December were agreed as a correct record.

4 Public Questions

The Select Committee had received a public question from Mr Chadwick.

Addressing the decline in town centres through town centre regeneration projects is clearly a good thing. It also provides great opportunities to adapt them and remodel them to create thriving communities, but in a way which also builds in sustainable and low carbon patterns of living – such as active travel, locating services and facilities close to residences to minimise the need for travel, incorporating high

energy efficiency standards in any related development, etc. Could the Cabinet Member please provide information and assurances about how town regeneration schemes are and will be developed and refined with these goals in mind?

Cllr Gareth Williams, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration provided a response, making the following main points:

- The Council is committed to the net zero agenda. We have many policies and targets that respond to our carbon reduction goals.
- This is well in excess of what Government expects or mandates us to do
- The Council had already carried out an audit in Environment portfolio with stringent carbon reduction targets
- For Town Centre regeneration the Council uses national standards and guidance of what makes Places thrive and sustainable, such as guidance from Institute of Place Management - within these standards there is the theme of Environment and Resources, as well as Public Realm, and Movement and Connectivity.
- They all feature in our Regeneration Framework setting out how best to regenerate our places.
- All these themes drive the Council towards regenerating in a way that is meeting low carbon patterns of living, therefore our Programme plans reflect this.
- An example of this is the Garden Way project in Aylesbury which is looking to provide more sustainable connections and routes into the town centre
- In High Wycombe the Council ensured that the Brunel Shed build project salvaged as much as possible, the original materials and re used recycled materials and the design brief also had sustainability criteria.

5 Digital Infrastructure Update

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Martin Tett, Leader of the Council and Lisa Michelson, Strategic Director – Economic Growth and Regeneration to the meeting. The Leader provided an overview of the history of broadband development in Buckinghamshire since he became leader of the previous County Council in 2011 and the various government initiatives that had been introduced and then explained the current projects that were underway to improve broadband coverage. The following main points were noted:

- The Leader had always seen digital infrastructure as a priority and felt broadband and superfast broadband was an essential utility. He had lobbied for more action on increasing broadband coverage nationally and alongside the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) had helped to negotiate the first Connected Counties contract with Hertfordshire and BDUK. Three of the four legacy District Councils in Buckinghamshire participated in the second Connected Counties contract with Hertfordshire and BDUK.
- The Connected Counties contracts included a gainshare and monies realised from that would be reinvested in new Broadband schemes going forward. Connected Counties contract 2 in April 2015 also had a gainshare element although it was not quite as generous. Whilst these contracts have helped to

achieve 97% coverage in terms of premises across the county, the current demands of zoom calls and streaming films means this infrastructure can sometimes struggle.

- A new initiative funded by Defra is the Rural Business Broadband Programme. This aims to support rural businesses to improve their broadband connections from below superfast connectivity (less than 30mb per second) to gigabit (more than 1000mb per second). The Council has a £1.8m contract with BT Openreach which is focussing on 'white areas', where there are no commercial delivery plans from suppliers.
- Covid had led to some delays in delivering the contract but it would connect 620 premises by June 2022.
- In addition, Government has opened a Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme for residents in rural areas, offering £1500 for residents and up to £3500 for rural businesses to gain gigabit capable broadband, via fibre to the premises. The Council was offering top up funding up to £2000 for residents and up to £3500 for businesses and was encouraging individuals to pool their vouchers and contract in groups. This local top up was making a significant difference in negotiating with commercial suppliers.
- To date 1767 vouchers had been requested with 500 premises connected out of a target of 2000. This had been funded by over £3.3m from Government and topped up by almost £1m from the Council.
- Project Gigabit is the Government's major drive to support increased coverage for gigabit broadband. Commercial providers had been asked to identify geographical they can supply gigabit capability and then the Government will step in to support the remaining 'white areas'. This was being driven by Government centrally although local authorities were being asked to provide a local steer. Buckinghamshire is in Lot 26 and an open market review has commenced. BDUK propose to start procurement for this area in Summer 22 and to commence the contract in Spring 2023 in Bucks, Herts and parts of Berkshire.
- Once the open market review has been completed and information published, the Council will have a clearer picture of contract coverage and where any 'white areas' may remain and be able to advise residents and businesses about plans to improve connectivity in their local areas.
- Finally, over the next 3 years, up to £110m of government funding UK wide will be invested into connecting rural buildings with no existing or planned superfast broadband such as schools, GP surgeries, libraries through Project Gigahub, in a hub and spoke network.
- The Government are looking for projects with a minimum of 100 sites, therefore the Council was in discussions with neighbouring authorities, Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire to identify potential sites to enable a joint project.
- The Leader noted that as part of the discussions at the HS2 Bill Committee in Parliament he received an assurance that HS2 would lay fibre along the track as this would provide low-cost interconnectivity for providers along the route. There was concern that HS2 might renege on this. A similar approach was being taken by East West Rail which would support local connectivity in

the north of the county.

- The Council by itself could not afford to provide digital infrastructure to the most remote rural properties as this was prohibitively expensive, but the Council was committed to supporting residents in taking advantage of the various programmes already outlined.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for this summary and invited questions. In response to members' questions and during subsequent discussions, the following main points were noted:

- The Council and Leader shared digital infrastructure successes on social media, such as the opening of new exchange areas, however this did have limited reach. As Project Gigabit developed, it would be important to publicise work that the Council was carrying out.
- There was good engagement with Buckinghamshire MPs and a working relationship was being sought with the new Digital Minister, Chris Philp.
- Regular meetings took place with Open Reach regarding contract targets. The Gainshare arrangement had been positive and showed other providers that there was potential high take up in Buckinghamshire. The Gainshare was split roughly 50/50 with the Buckinghamshire LEP.
- Amounts allocated as part of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme would vary on a case-by-case basis up to £3,500. The extent these funds would go would depend on the connectivity being delivered in the rural area.
- Commercial viability played a significant role in the work of providers and there was little the Council could do to influence this. It was currently not known whether some reported 'sterile' broadband areas in the county would be assisted by Project Gigabit.
- Caution would need to be exercised by any Parish Council looking to partner with a provider to deliver a broadband service. This would be a very complex task and was best left to commercial providers.
- Once a voucher was issued, the impetus was on the user to spend it with the provider. Vouchers could be pooled together amongst the local community and the Council could consider bridging any funding gaps based on what a project sought to achieve. Local Members had a key role to play in coordinating projects within their Wards and communities.
- It was acknowledged the council's website regarding schemes could be improved for clarity and to demonstrate successful community projects. The Council had to be careful not to advertise specific providers.
- The Connected Counties programme had delivered a mix of coverage across Buckinghamshire based on commercial viability. Results from the Open Market Review would indicate commercial and non-commercial areas, and also show where delivering Project Gigabit would demonstrate best value.
- The Leader provided an undertaking to update the Select Committee on Project Gigabit as it developed.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Lisa Michelson for the report and the information provided at the meeting.

6 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Cabinet Member for Homelessness, Councillor Mark Winn, to the meeting and invited him to introduce the Strategy. The Homelessness Act 2002 required the Council to have a strategy and Buckinghamshire Council's draft Strategy had been discussed at Cabinet 15 February 2022. A four-week public consultation, including notification to all Community Boards, would follow and amendments to the Strategy would be considered based on the comments. It would then be considered by Full Council in April.

The following main points were noted:

- Prior to the pandemic, there were 34 classified rough sleepers in Buckinghamshire; this had now been reduced to 7 with 4 of these having been offered accommodation.
- The 'Everyone In' scheme during the pandemic had given the outreach team the opportunity to engage with clients and assist on their journey to self-support in accommodation.
- In January 2022, the service carried out 28 interventions to prevent occurrences of rough sleeping.
- As well as Ardenham House, Aylesbury, there were two government funded support packages: the Next Step Accommodation Programme and the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme.
- The Next Step Accommodation Programme had nine completed units and seven further units had been acquired at Harrow Churches for 'move on' accommodation for former rough sleepers.
- The YMCA, Wycombe, had 11 units under development as part of the Rough Sleepers Accommodation Programme. The Vale of Aylesbury Housing Trust (VAHT) would soon be opening seven units in Aylesbury.
- Support for mental health, training and employment opportunities would be available through projects.
- One of the challenges identified in the Strategy was relationship breakdown which was often linked to domestic abuse. Mental health and offending history were also contributory factors.
- In addition the Council was working to support young care leavers in securing and maintaining a tenancy.
- Early intervention was important and over 2,000 households had approached the service for advice and support in 2020/21. Of these, over 50% of eligible households had successfully been prevented from becoming homeless and around 30% were moved to alternative accommodation.
- The Deputy Cabinet Member outlined the six main priorities within the Strategy which underpinned the overall vision. Two themes crosscut the Strategy: making best use of resources and partnership working.

In response to questions from Select Committee Members, the following points were noted:

- The Deputy Cabinet Member would review follow up on information that had been submitted in response to a question raised in September 2021's meeting.
- Benchmarking against other local authorities was difficult due to individual circumstances within each council area. The service would consider finding a suitable local authority that was comparable for benchmarking purposes in the Strategy.
- A Member briefing on the Strategy would be held in the next month and a Member training session was already scheduled. Members were encouraged to submit their feedback during these sessions.
- It was clarified that the 28 individuals assisted in January 2022 were at risk of becoming a rough sleeper. The 34 units in development were 'move on' accommodation for rough sleepers.
- Members of the Committee felt that they would benefit in receiving statistical data on homelessness and rough sleeping which would inform their comments when responding to the consultation. It was also noted that updates on this data would be necessary to monitor the issue. Additionally, clearer information on defined terminologies, waiting lists and successful preventions would be welcomed.

Action: N Dicker / M Veryard

- There was a detailed action plan and evidence base publicly available in the Cabinet papers on Tuesday 15 February. These papers would be included as part of the consultation.
- It was acknowledged that homelessness and rough sleeping was multi-faceted and that the council services needed to work together to reduce its likelihood. The Deputy Cabinet Member referenced the recent Ofsted report which recommended closer working with Children's Services and this had been incorporated into the draft Strategy. Aspirations to provide more affordable housing in Buckinghamshire also underpinned the draft Strategy.
- Detailed work on the Bucks Home Choice Allocation Policy would be carried out this summer with engagement with Members and stakeholders. The policy had already been changed regarding care-leavers and the local connection requirement.
- The outreach service liaised with charities such as the Oasis Partnership, Wycombe Homelessness Connection and Aylesbury Homelessness Action Group (AHAG). Oxford Health also assisted with mental health. These organisations spoke to rough sleepers and homeless individuals to offer support and encourage the accommodation offer.
- The 11 units at YMCA and the 8 VAHT units had been embargoed by MHCLG which meant that the Council had not been able to discuss them publicly. The opening of the Bridge Court site, Desborough Road, had been scheduled to open last year but had been delayed due to Covid; the aim was to open these 58 units this spring.
- The Council had numerous methods of stopping homelessness such as offering support with rent arrears and providing financial advice. Each individual case was managed carefully due to differing circumstances.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Cabinet Member and officers for attending.

* **ADDENDUM** – Following the meeting, it was agreed that members of the Committee should feed in their comments on the strategy via the Member Briefing which was held on 21st March as part of the consultation process, rather than revisiting the strategy at the April meeting.

7 Town Centre Regeneration

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Councillor Gareth Williams, and Deputy Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration, Councillor Jocelyn Towns. The Deputy Cabinet Member introduced the report and highlighted the following points:

- Town Centre regeneration in Buckinghamshire needed to consider each individual locality. Work was being carried out to develop shared visions and narratives to see how local places see the future of their town centres taking into account hybrid working and shopping habits.
- Early indications were that large brands were vacating town centres, thereby leaving large empty spaces. These could be repurposed to meet needs such as homes, culture, leisure and hospitality spaces.
- The Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework was being developed which would set out key factors to make town centres successful. This had started in Aylesbury and High Wycombe.

Richard Wood, High Street Task Force Ambassador, delivered a presentation to the Select Committee which highlighted the following:

- Regeneration needed to be place-based with a long-term vision that was multi-dimensional.
- The Cities Outlook 2022 report was an in-depth piece at the state of UK high streets. The report highlighted uncertainty over future working patterns.
- The vaccine roll out had supported high street footfall recovery with smaller centres recovering more quickly than larger cities and regional centres.
- High streets were increasingly looking to become multi-functional by combining shopping, employment and culture.
- The Buckinghamshire Regeneration Framework intended to be an enabling approach to allow local areas and communities to work collaboratively addressing local priorities.

In the Committee discussion that followed, the following main points were noted:

- It would be confirmed that the accommodation at the Chilterns, High Wycombe, would be of mixed capacity. Officers would also investigate the re-siting costs for businesses.

Action: L Michelson

- The Regeneration Framework would work with individual villages, Town and Parish Councils to also meet their needs. The Framework was expected to be

finalised by the autumn with a draft coming back to the Committee before then.

- Some of the capital projects in the report were from legacy council arrangements. The service was investing in better strategy work to consider what regeneration meant outside the larger Buckinghamshire towns. Additionally, a Chesham Regeneration Group had been set up.
- Accessibility was a consideration with regeneration projects. For instance, the Aylesbury Garden Town Board contained a member representing Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS) with comments fed into planning to meet public needs. Some areas of the county also had devolved services to meet these needs.
- One Member commented that Community Boards would benefit from having examples shared with them of regeneration initiatives across the UK.
- The Council was considering identifying some areas which they might want to protect from permitted development. This would maintain a local level of planning control on high streets.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member, Deputy Cabinet Member and officers for the report and information.

8 Member Engagement in Planning report

In the absence of the Inquiry Chairman, Councillor Peter Brazier introduced the Inquiry Report to the Select Committee. The Group had found the review useful, and the report outlined a number of recommendations on Member Engagement in Planning. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration advised that Member Surgeries had now commenced and that officers were encouraged to telephone Members more. The Member Handbook and GIS Map training for Members were under consideration.

Feedback was noted by the Cabinet Member on streamlining the process of booking a Member Surgery timeslot. Another Member commented that reducing the need for chasing up the Planning service and reducing invalid planning applications would assist service resource.

The Chairman thanked all Members for their input into the Inquiry.

9 Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

10 Date of next meeting

7 April 2022.

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Follow up information requested at GIH Select Committee 17th February 2022

- It would be confirmed that the accommodation at the Chilterns, High Wycombe, would be of mixed capacity. Officers would also investigate the re-siting costs for businesses.

Action: L Michelson

- Number of units - Approx 320, subject to planning.
- Mix of tenure and types – This is a proposed BTR (Build to Rent) scheme. Such schemes are not mixed-tenure. The principal of no affordable housing has already been established with Planning, on financial viability grounds. BTR is aimed at young professionals, adding to vitality in the town centre.
- Plan for 'rehousing' current businesses in the shopping centre - Some of the existing small businesses are in discussion with the Council over potential relocation opportunities. Terms have been agreed with one; another has been assisted to move into Eden; a third is under negotiation. It is hoped that the 'anchor' tenant (Wilko) will relocate into Eden.

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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.

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 []

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Report to Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Date: 13th April 2022

Title: Levelling Up White Paper

Author: Lisa Michelson

Recommendations: That the Committee note this update on the Government's national Levelling Up White Paper and the Council's consideration of this new policy.

1. Background

- 1.1 On the 2nd of February, the Government published its Levelling Up White Paper which set out its approach to Levelling Up as a core economic policy.
- 1.2 This report sets out the key contents of the White Paper and the implications for Buckinghamshire (as a council and place), as well as the likely approach that the Council will take.

2. Summary of the Levelling Up White Paper

- 2.1 The White Paper sets out the economic, social, and moral mission of Levelling Up to unleash opportunity, prosperity, and pride in places, improving living standards, and quality of life. It makes the case for the need to address geographical disparities in social and economic outcomes across the UK.
- 2.2 The proposed contemporary model for Levelling Up has four key outcomes.
 1. **Boost productivity, pay, jobs, and living standards by growing the private sector**, especially in those places where they are lagging
 2. **Spread opportunities and improve public services**, especially in those places where they are weakest
 3. **Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging**, especially in those places where they have been lost
 4. **Empower local leaders and communities**, especially in those places lacking local agency

- 2.3 Although led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the recent White Paper is wide-ranging, crossing departmental policy areas and covering topics as diverse as innovation, education, and crime. It sets out a broad policy agenda for Levelling Up with announcements on housing and regeneration, education and skills, and innovation, as well as twelve mid-term Levelling Up Missions to be achieved by 2030.
- 2.4 It also included announcements about the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which is expected to be launched shortly.

Six Capitals

- 2.5 Six forms of ‘capital’ are set out as a framework for evaluating existing geographical disparities. Individually, the ‘capitals’ are important drivers of growth, yet the Government suggest it is their interdependence and interaction with each other that reinforces their significance.
- 2.6 The ‘capitals’ are:
1. Physical: infrastructure, machines, and housing
 2. Human: skills, health, and experience of the workforce
 3. Intangible: innovation, ideas, and patents
 4. Financial: resources supporting the financing of companies
 5. Social: strength of communities, relationships, and trust
 6. Institutional: local leadership, capacity, and capability
- 2.7 It is worth noting that the White Paper does not identify natural capital in the above list. The rationale from Government for this omission is that existing policy strategies are already in place for this; their lack of inclusion should not be perceived as environmental concerns having a lower priority.

Five mutually reinforcing pillars

- 2.8 Turning to the proposed reform, five mutually reinforcing pillars underpin the Levelling Up policy regime as key elements.
- 2.9 The pillars are:
1. 12 Medium Term missions
 - i. An anchor for policy across government
 - ii. Rolling decade-long objectives intended to drive change through cooperation across sectors
 2. Reshaping central government decision-making
 - i. Levelling Up Cabinet Committee

- ii. Levelling Up Directors – will act as a single point of contact for Local Leaders
- 3. Empower local decision-making
 - i. New Devolution framework
 - ii. Private sector partnerships to support existing and embryonic private sector clusters of economic activity
- 4. The role of data, monitoring, and evaluation
 - i. Subnational data and analysis strategy
 - ii. New Spatial Data Unit within DLUHC
- 5. Transparency and Accountability
 - i. New external Levelling Up Advisory Council to support Ministers by providing independent expert advice

The Twelve Missions

2.10 As one of the pillars, Government have adopted a mission-based approach to addressing complex, long-term societal challenges through targeted, measurable, and time-bound objectives.

2.11 These Twelve Missions are:

1. By 2030, pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area of the UK, with each containing a globally competitive city, and the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.
2. By 2030, domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East will increase by at least 40%, and over the Spending Review period by at least one third. This additional government funding will seek to leverage at least twice as much private sector investment over the long term to stimulate innovation and productivity growth.
3. By 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.
4. By 2030, the UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population
5. By 2030, the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased. In England, this will mean 90% of children will achieve the expected standard, and the percentage of children meeting the expected standard in the worst performing areas will have increased by over a third.

6. By 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas.
7. By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.
8. By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
9. By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
10. By 2030, renters will have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.
11. By 2030, homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas.
12. By 2030, every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

2.12 [Initial headline metrics](#) have been published alongside the White Paper and Government have committed to developing a longer suite of metrics to track performance. More detail of each of these missions is also described in that document.

Devolution

- 2.13 Devolution and governance are core elements of the reforms. Principal to this is the long-awaited Devolution Framework. Alongside the framework, nine pathfinding County Deals and extensions to existing devolution deals were also announced.
- 2.14 Buckinghamshire was unfortunately not named as part of the initial set of pathfinder deals but continues to lobby Government for a County Deal as part of a future tranche.
- 2.15 The Devolution Framework (see appendix 1) is set out in three levels:
 - **Level 3** – A single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor, across a functional economic area or whole county area

- **Level 2** – A single institution or County Council without a directly elected mayor, across a functional economic area or whole county area;
- **Level 1** – Local authorities working together across a FEA or whole county area e.g., through a joint committee

2.16 Buckinghamshire falls into ‘Level 2’ in the above list.

2.17 All Devolution Deals will be based on the four principles of:

1. Effective leadership: favouring prominent and accountable leaders.
2. Sensible geography: ensuring deals are based on recognisable communities with a sensible economic area.
3. Flexibility: making sure devolution deals are tailored to each area’s needs.
4. Appropriate accountability: ensuring transparency and value for money.

Other Key Components Relating to Growth from the White Paper

2.18 **Housing and Regeneration:** funding for town centre regeneration schemes and measures aimed at increasing house building (particularly outside the south east).

2.19 **Education and Skills:** increased investment and focus on areas where educational outcomes are currently the weakest.

2.20 **Innovation:** government investments in research development and the introduction of three ‘Innovation Accelerators’ in Manchester, Glasgow, and the midlands, which will place-based centres of innovation.

3. Other Aspects of Note from the White Paper

3.1 Buckinghamshire and our neighbours in the South East are not identified as priority areas for the focus for this policy agenda. The Levelling Up Policy has a geographical approach which focusses (primarily) on the Northern part of the country.

3.2 The White Paper sets out expectations of the role local government will have in levelling up their communities through empowering local leaders with the resources they need. Buckinghamshire is already exploring opportunities to tackle geographical variations in outcomes within the county, through discussions with our partners and in building a better understanding of these variations.

3.3 County Deals have been announced in 9 places, but as mentioned before, Buckinghamshire was not included in the first tranche. Additionally, in looking at the recent deal announcements, it appears that County Deals do not come with ‘new’ funding. However, the White Paper commits to agreeing deals with every area that wants one between now and 2030. There are options for Buckinghamshire to engage with government about our readiness for a deal with an eye to moving up the timetable.

- 3.4 The deal sets out a devolution framework which indicates a number of powers and freedoms and flexibilities which correspond to areas' level of 'devolution'. With 1 being the lowest devolved, and 3 being the highest, Buckinghamshire is currently classed in 'level 2'. Level 2 includes a number of new powers that Buckinghamshire could consider including greater control of local transport, ability to introduce bus franchising, the ability to provide input into local skills improvement plans, and Homes England compulsory purchase powers. Buckinghamshire is also considering what further powers could be secured beyond 'level 2' through negotiation.
- 3.5 The White Paper talks about an expanded remit for Homes England and new emphasis on their role in town centre regeneration This new alignment for Homes England is positive as it can be developed to support Buckinghamshire's regeneration proposals.
- 3.6 The White Paper clarified the new approach for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (which replaces previous European Regional Development Funding). The formula basis for funding allocation indicates that Buckinghamshire is unlikely to receive a significant allocation.
- 3.7 The White Paper has a distinct emphasis on developing innovation-based growth. This emphasis plays into one of Buckinghamshire's economic strengths and could be a means for exploring options for investment.

4. Next steps and review

- 4.1 Buckinghamshire will engage with the new Levelling Up White Paper policy and explore how our County Deal proposition can be delivered going forward. This is likely to be a combination of eventually securing a County Deal with Government, but also developing ways for Buckinghamshire to take forward some aspects on our own.
- 4.2 Given the ambition and extent of the deals already announced, it is expected that there may be limited capacity at Government Departments to develop our County Deal in the short term.
- 4.3 The council (in conjunction with the Growth Board) has already developed our proposition very well and can respond at haste if a discussion about future County Deals turns to Buckinghamshire.
- 4.4 The full Levelling Up White Paper can be read at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

Appendix 1

Function	Detail	L1	L2	L3
Strategic role in delivering services	Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies	✓	✓	✓
	Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level	✓	✓	✓
	Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets	✓	✓	✓
Supporting local businesses	LEP functions including hosting strategic business voice		✓	✓
Local control of sustainable transport	Control of appropriate local transport functions e.g. local transport plans*		✓	✓
	Defined key route network*			✓
	Priority for new rail partnerships with Great British Railways – influencing local rail offer, e.g. services and stations			✓
	Ability to introduce bus franchising		✓	✓
	Consolidation of existing core local transport funding for local road maintenance and smaller upgrades into a multi-year integrated settlement			✓
Investment spending	UKSPF planning and delivery at a strategic level		✓	✓
	Long-term investment fund, with an agreed annual allocation			✓
Giving adults the skills for the labour market	Devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget		✓	✓
	Providing input into Local Skills Improvement Plans		✓	✓
	Role in designing and delivering future contracted employment programmes			✓
Local control of infrastructure decisions	Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations (with consent of host local planning authority)			✓
	Devolution of locally-led brownfield funding			✓
	Strategic partnerships with Homes England across the Affordable Housing Programme and brownfield funding			✓
	Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)		✓	✓
Keeping the public safe and healthy	Mayoral control of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) functions where boundaries align^			✓
	Clear defined role in local resilience*		✓	✓
	Where desired offer MCAs a duty for improving the public's health (concurrently with local authorities)			✓
Financing local initiatives for residents and business	Ability to introduce mayoral precepting on council tax*			✓
	Ability to introduce supplement on business rates (increases subject to ballot)			✓

* refers to functions which are only applicable to combined authorities

^ refers to functions which are currently only applicable to mayoral combined authorities

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