



Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee Agenda

Date: Thursday 7 September 2023

Time: 2.00 pm

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

Membership:

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

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Agenda Item	Time	Page No
1 Apologies for Absence/Changes in Membership		
2 Declarations of Interest		
3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting		5 - 8

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2023 be confirmed 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/>

5 Visitor Economy Strategy Update

14:10

9 - 16

Members will review the progress made towards a Visitor Economy Strategy.

This update follows on from the joint meeting held 13 July 2022 with the Communities and Localism Select Committee on the Visitor Economy. As such, a small group of Communities and Localism Select Committee members will be present for the item.

Contributors:

Cllr Martin Tett, Leader

Cllr Clive Harriss, Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure

Cllr Rachael Matthews, Deputy Cabinet Member, Town Centre Regeneration

Richard Ambrose, Service Director, Economic Growth & Regeneration

Matthew Broadbent, Senior Economic Development Officer

Richard Dickinson, Tomorrow's Tourism

Sophie Payne, Service Director, Culture, Sport and Leisure

Ruth Page, Culture & Leisure Services Development Manager

Philippa Batting, Managing Director for Buckinghamshire Business First

Lucy Dowson, Tourism Development Manager for Visit Buckinghamshire

6 Local Plan for Buckinghamshire Update

15:00

17 - 22

Members will receive an update on the progress of the

Buckinghamshire Local Plan.

Contributors:

Cllr Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration

Darran Eggleton, Head of Planning Policy and Compliance

John Cheston, Planning Policy Manager

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| 7 | Housing Standards Update | 15:35 | 23 - 28 |
| | Members will receive an update regarding Housing Standards, in particular to address issues pertaining to Damp and Mould across Buckinghamshire. | | |
| | <p>This update was requested following the report that was presented at the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee meeting held 16 February 2023.</p> | | |
| | <p>Contributors:
Cllr Mark Winn, Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory Services
Lisa Michelson, Service Director, Housing & Regulatory Services
Jacqui Bromilow, Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards</p> | | |
| 8 | Work Programme | | 29 - 30 |
| | The Committee will discuss and note the Work Programme for future meetings. | | |
| 9 | Date of Next Meeting | | |
| | 23 rd November 2023 at 10.00am. | | |

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: Tom Fowler 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 6 JULY 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM AND CONCLUDING AT 11.15 AM

MEMBERS PRESENT

D Carroll (Chairman), S Chapple, Q Chaudhry, I Darby, C Poll, S Rouse, D Town, S Wilson, P Brazier and P Cooper

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Matthews, P Strachan and C Urry

Agenda Item

1 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman confirmed the appointment of Cllr Thomas Hogg as vice-chairman of the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee for the ensuing year.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Apologies had been received from Councillors N Marshall, A Baughan, T Hogg, C Etholen and T Hunter-Watts.

Councillor P Brazier was present as substitute for Councillor T Hogg.

Councillor P Cooper was present as substitute for Councillor T Hunter-Watts.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Stuart Wilson declared an interest in item 6 as a Member of the Member Development Working Group.

Councillor Rachael Matthews declared an interest in item 6 as Chairman of the Member Development Working Group.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 6th April and 17th May 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

6 MEMBER ENGAGEMENT IN PLANNING - 12-MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed, Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, Councillor Rachael Matthews, Deputy Cabinet Member for Town Centre Regeneration and Christine Urry, Head of Planning and Development to the meeting.

The following points were highlighted from the report.

- The Member Planning Handbook provided an overview of the planning service as well as a detail of how Members could be involved.
- Political Awareness training sessions had been well received by Planning Officers and would be provided corporately going forward. Officers were especially interested to hear how Members took the path to become Councillors.
- Meet the Planner events, and Planning Surgeries were held regularly allowing Members to build relationships, and approach officers with planning queries.
- Merging GIS systems from legacy Council's was complex and dependent on moving to a single Uniform. There were more than 1000 map layers to amalgamate into a new mapping system, it would take considerable time to achieve this. GIS systems were required for officer, member & public provision, therefore considerable work was necessary to implement a suitable system.

Members raised the following points.

- There was intention to update the Member Planning Handbook annually and provide it to Members as part of the Annual Member Refresher Training. The Handbook was to be published following the Member Development Working Group meeting to be held 11th July 2023.
- There were varying levels of Planning knowledge among Members, with those on Planning Committee's having more experience and special training. Those Members less engaged with the Planning system would find the Handbook especially useful.
- The Member Planning Handbook could provide an improvement in terms of Officer time spent responding to Member queries. This would be monitored to assess the impact.
- It was noted that the Planning Handbook was very well constructed and would be useful for Members. If uncertainty over interpretation was common (e.g. grey areas), it would be reviewed to see if more detail was required.
- It was suggested that the escalation procedure (with regards to recommended officer response timescales), and links to existing GIS Map provision be added to the Member Planning Handbook.
- The Cabinet Member noted his disappointment with the level of engagement by a large number Members with the Planning Service. It was suggested to investigate what is preventing Members from attending events. The Cabinet Member would take the engagement point back for discussion with other Cabinet Members.
- The Meet the Planner events were well received, and the formal presentation mixed with the informal chat was useful for attending Members. There were opportunities at these events to build relationships with officers. Going forward, it was suggested that as Members strengthened relationships with officers the number of these events could be reduced.
- Timetables for Planning Member events and surgeries were available on Bucksnet (the internal Buckinghamshire Council intranet) for Members.
- A Member noted that following Planning events, there was now a relationship between themselves and Planning Officers which allowed for good communication to meet the demands of their ward.

- Members expressed their thanks for the work put into the review, and the resulting documents & actions that had been completed as a result.

7 JOINT RAPID REVIEW WITH THE HEALTH & ADULT SOCIAL CARE SELECT COMMITTEE - FUTURE HEALTHCARE PROVISION IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Members considered the Joint Rapid Review with the Health & Adult Social Care Select Committee - Future Healthcare Provision in Buckinghamshire scoping document. This review was to be conducted jointly between the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee (GIH) and the Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee (HASC).

There would be 8 Members in total (including the chairs), 4 would be drawn from each Select Committee.

It was noted that Councillors Isobel Darby and Chris Poll would be joint chairing the review group. They would be chairing on behalf of the GIH and HASC Select Committees respectively.

Councillors Stuart Wilson & Derek Town volunteered to take part as Members of the review group. Any other Members that wished to join the review group were advised to contact the scrutiny officer.

8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Work Programme for 2023-24 was agreed.

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place 7th September 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

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Report to Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Date:	7 September 2023
Title:	Visitor Economy Strategy Update
Cabinet Member(s):	CLr Martin Tett, CLr Rachael Matthews and CLr Clive Harriss
Contact officer:	Matt Broadbent, Senior Economic Development Officer (matthew.broadbent@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)
Ward(s) affected:	None specific
Recommendations:	<p>1. To endorse the direction of travel for the emerging Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan taking stock of the opportunities and data identified in this paper.</p> <p>2. To support Visit Buckinghamshire in seeking accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership under the VisitEngland programme.</p>
Reason for decision:	To develop a more coherent, strategic approach to growing our visitor economy making it an attractive offer for our residents and visitors; and to support our businesses in the tourism sector.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 Buckinghamshire’s visitor economy is currently worth approximately £1.1 billion and is driven by a strong small business base. We currently rank relatively low as a county for domestic travel but a more focused approach to developing our visitor offer could lead to improvements in terms of overnight stays and day trips from

outside the area. Developing our visitor offer will also be beneficial to Buckinghamshire residents, making the county a more attractive place to live.

- 1.2 The Economic Growth & Regeneration Service has spent the last year developing a Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan for Buckinghamshire alongside some of the Council's key strategic partners and based on input from businesses and Buckinghamshire residents.
- 1.3 Since the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing and Communities & Localism Select Committees met last summer, we have gained much more data, engaged more with partners and stakeholders and a wider understanding of our visitor economy across the county and how the Council and partners can support it.

2. Content of report

Background

- 2.1 The Growth, Infrastructure & Housing and Localism Select Committees held a joint meeting 13 July 2022. Support was given for the development of a Visitor Economy Strategy and supporting Action Plan for Buckinghamshire, to be led and funded by the Council in partnership with Visit Buckinghamshire (our Destination Management Organisation) and other key stakeholders.
- 2.2 The project has been managed by the Economic Development Team with a joint Project Sponsor arrangement at Director level between Economic Growth & Regeneration and the Culture, Sport & Leisure Directorates. Buckinghamshire-based consultancy Tomorrow's Tourism were appointed to support this work.
- 2.3 This paper is presented to give CMT an update on the strategy development process in advance of the Select Committee meeting on 7 September, some headline findings, and next steps to be taken to produce our strategy and action plan. It also provides information on the Destination Management Organisation (DMO) review that is underway by VisitEngland at the national level

Tourism in Buckinghamshire overview

- 2.4 The visitor economy is a strategic opportunity for Buckinghamshire. Business growth in this sector creates benefits in terms of greater turnover, strengthening local supply chains, better place promotion and job creation – with tourism also being a ready provider of entry level jobs as well as more specialist and skilled roles.
- 2.5 Latest data (2019) shows that over £1.1 billion was spent in Buckinghamshire over 20 million visits. Buckinghamshire's tourism sector in 2022 comprised: 169 visitor attractions, 115 annual events and over 1,000 places to stay. The visitor economy consists of 2,125 businesses employing more than 21,000 people. Many of our tourism businesses are 'micro' businesses (under 10 employees) which gives

opportunities to cluster, curate and promote the broad range on offer at the level of place.

- 2.6 Buckinghamshire ranks 39th out of 49 counties for volume of domestic travel in terms of overnight stays and day trips, providing a prime opportunity to build. Although having a good variety on offer, Bucks has fewer opportunities for visitor spend than neighbouring Oxfordshire or Hertfordshire, particularly in terms of the number of food and drink outlets, performing arts, sports and amusement facilities.
- 2.7 Historically, the promotion of Buckinghamshire's tourism sector has been focused on 'place based' campaigns for individual towns or wider geographies, such as the Chilterns. The challenge to create a Buckinghamshire-wide level marketing voice drove Buckinghamshire Business First to develop a Destination Management Plan in 2013 and establish 'Visit Buckinghamshire and the Chilterns' as our Destination Management Organisation (DMO).
- 2.8 With the creation of a new unitary council, the onset of Covid and the impact this had on our hospitality and tourism sector, the need for a strategy for Buckinghamshire was recognised in order to take a more strategic and coherent approach, increase visitor numbers and support the wider local economy of Buckinghamshire.

Strategy development and engagement

- 2.9 Tomorrow's Tourism have carried out a variety of activities to help our strategy development and these include:
 - a) Desktop research and an 'asset audit' to determine the shape of Buckinghamshire's visitor economy and its performance against other county areas.
 - b) A deeper drive into seven places to determine catchment, visitor demographics and spend (Aylesbury; Buckingham; High Wycombe; Marlow; the Ridgeway (Coombe Hill area); Waddesdon and Pinewood).
 - c) Interviews of key visitor economy stakeholders.
 - d) Survey of businesses, residents and stakeholders (including Town and Parish Councils) that achieved an excellent response (734 replies)
 - e) Workshops with key businesses and stakeholders (from different hospitality/tourism sectors) including different teams across the Council.
- 2.10 The engagement process has helped develop a network of key players in the sector. Those who took part valued being asked and could see the potential of the strategy and want to be part of the journey as this is delivered. It has also helped to identify businesses who are driving innovation and partnership working to deliver a quality offer for visitors and can act as case studies/exemplars to others.

Key findings and opportunities

- 2.11 Stakeholder engagement and survey work has identified five core strategic priorities to steer the delivery of the Visitor Economy Strategy:
- a) Improving the marketing and promotion of Buckinghamshire
 - b) Strengthening Visit Buckinghamshire (DMO) to provide the overarching function and deliver the shared priorities
 - c) Encouraging development of new visitor attractions, activities, events or experiences
 - d) Improving collaboration across public and private sectors
 - e) Encouraging Buckinghamshire's visitor economy to become more accessible (focus on disability).
- 2.12 The research clearly demonstrates that Buckinghamshire has many different strengths and the focus should not be placed on trying to attribute one individual USP to our county. This large range of different strengths enable a narrative/story telling approach to place promotion to curate, pivot and target promotion of our varied visitor offer. This, in itself, can be seen as one of Buckinghamshire's key strengths – having an offer for different audiences will enable the county to capitalise on different visitor profiles all year round.
- 2.13 While historically we have had limited coordination at county level, the engagement from stakeholders across the county at the level of place will be a strong asset when curating products for visitors. Capitalising on this local, place-based knowledge will help to deliver a more effective strategy and action plan.
- 2.14 The analysis of our tourism business base shows:
- a) Since 2016 Bucks has seen an 843 per cent increase (from 79 to 745) in the number of non-serviced accommodation units (Airbnb, camping etc)
 - b) There is a greater supply of accommodation in the south of the county, particularly in the Chilterns – the largest provision being in the SW Chilterns community board area (Marlow and Hambleden Valley)
 - c) For Bucks, as a significant rural area, there is a lack of camping/glamping opportunities
 - d) The highest concentration of accommodation in the north of the county being in Buckingham
 - e) The Chilterns has an extremely strong offer with regards to high quality pubs/restaurants plus festivals and events.
- 2.15 Looking at the core market (catchment) highlighted that 92.9 per cent of total visitors are domestic day visits (19 million), with only 1.7 per cent (360k) being from

overseas. However, the value of overseas visits was 13 per cent (£152 million of the £1.1 billion overall spend).

- 2.16 With respect to overseas visitors, based on an analysis of seven locations (Aylesbury, High Wycombe, Buckingham, Marlow, The Ridgeway (Coombe Hill), Waddesdon and Pinewood) U.S. visitors made up almost 20 per cent of total overseas visits. This is a significantly higher share than the national average (7.7%). This is most likely due to our strong heritage/stately home offer and proximity to London.
- 2.17 The research highlights that there are an exciting range of marketing communications possibilities and avenues to explore as part of the action plan: balancing the conversion of domestic day visits to overnight stays v attracting international visitors and spend.
- 2.18 Analysis of the data and looking at our strengths and opportunities in the round, Tomorrow's Tourism propose that our Action Plan focuses on the following themes:
- a) *Countryside and Active Leisure*: The Chilterns provides an excellent offer for walking, cycling and outdoor experiences and has a strong local business base catering to both visitors and residents. We also have the highest number of National Trust properties of any English county meaning there is an excellent opportunity to work with our properties to develop a stronger experiential offer.
 - b) *Local Food and Drink*: 20 per cent of Buckinghamshire events relate to quality food and drink and we have a range of highly rated pubs and restaurants, breweries and vineyards. Developing a strong network between local producers and venues could create a unique offer
 - c) *Culture, Festivals, Events and the Film Industry*: We already have a wide variety of festivals taking place across the county. There is an opportunity to develop our existing festival offer and to work with organisers of potential future events. With the development of the Film Office over the long term, the proximity of Pinewood Studios and the strong selection of filming venues, this could be an area on which to build in the longer term.
 - d) *Accessibility and Inclusion*: Buckinghamshire is the birthplace of the Paralympic Movement and hosts the National Paralympic Heritage Centre. Building on the work already started here and with partners like BBF and Visit Buckinghamshire, Buckinghamshire could focus on becoming a more accessible destination.

VisitEngland and Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) Programme.

- 2.19 Concurrent to our strategy development work, VisitEngland and the National Tourist Board are currently reforming the way it works with and supports DMOs. It is looking to streamline this process by creating a tiering system that will require DMOs to

meet specific criteria to gain accreditation as a 'Local Visitor Economy Partnership' (LVEP).

- 2.20 Looking at Buckinghamshire as a whole, there are currently two DMOs: Visit Buckinghamshire and the Chilterns and Destination Milton Keynes. There will be DMO level discussion on the scope and scale of coverage for Buckinghamshire.
- 2.21 A key criterion for being recognised as a LVEP is having a Visitor Economy Strategy that outlines public and private sector support and a clear strategic direction. Our work to support Visit Bucks is very timely for this.
- 2.22 Gaining accreditation as an LVEP would allow Buckinghamshire to have greater support and potential funding from Visit England and DCMS and would put the county in a strong position to market itself as a distinct destination.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 Not applicable.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 The Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan are in the final stages of development. Ahead of Member sign off and publication, engagement work is required with partners and key stakeholders to ensure deliverability of the emerging Action Plan and also to better quantify costings and funding sources.
- 4.2 This strategy is also designed to influence further investment from other areas, including industry and developing a more visible DMO will better place us for grants from elsewhere.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 The publication of the Strategy and Action Plan, as well as a greater focus on the opportunities identified during the development process, will contribute to the Corporate Plan priority 'Increasing Prosperity'.
- 5.2 A number of potential risks and threats have been identified around delivery of the Action Plan. Firstly, it is worth acknowledging that, while the Action Plan will look to identify a number of different strands of activities, we do have a limited capacity across the Council and DMO. In addition to this, a threat identified early on focuses on the potential negative implications of losing funding, which would mean difficulty achieving the objectives set out in the strategy.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 The Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan will be approved by Cabinet decision. Community Boards and Town and Parish Councils were invited to contribute to the development of the strategy through a stakeholder survey.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 Extensive engagement was carried out as part of the strategy development with a number of different Council service areas, including Culture, Sports & Leisure and Planning, Growth & Sustainability. The strategy was developed in collaboration with a number of external partners, including Buckinghamshire Business First and Visit Buckinghamshire. A survey and workshop were also carried out to seek the views of visitor economy businesses and stakeholders, including the LEP and across various different sectors including food and drink, accommodation and attraction providers. This engagement will continue beyond publication through the delivery of the action plan and strategy where we will need continued shared ownership with our key partners.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 This item will be included in the six-month update on January 2023 Budget Scrutiny discussions at Finance & Resources Select Committee on 25 September 2023.
- 8.2 The research to date has given the council the component parts it needs to develop the Visitor Economy Strategy and Action Plan. Work is underway to pull both of these documents together over the coming months.
- 8.3 The Action Plan will set out both strategic and practical activities in the short (one year), medium (five years) and long term (seven years). It will provide indicative resource implications (people and money) to support budget discussions/wider funding allocation identification and activity prioritisation to be made ahead of publication.
- 8.4 We will return to CMT for endorsement of the strategy and action plan when it is drafted, ahead of seeking adoption from Cabinet.

9. Background papers

- 9.1 VisitEngland (2023), *Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) Programme*.
<https://www.visitbritain.org/local-visitor-economy-partnerships-lvep-programme>

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 email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.



Report to the Growth, Infrastructure & Housing Select Committee

Date:	7 September 2023
Title:	Update on the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor Peter Strachan, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration
Contact officer:	John Cheston, Planning Policy Manager
Ward(s) affected:	All wards
Recommendations:	To note the progress made on the preparation of the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire
Reason for decision:	To ensure that the Select Committee is kept up to date with the progress made on the Local Plan.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the progress made on the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire (**LP4B** or **Plan**). The key topics covered are:
- a) Update on technical work and recent and proposed public engagement
 - b) Planning reforms and their consequences for the LP4B.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 This report updates the Select Committee on the progress to date on, and the current position with, the Local Plan.
- 2.2 The Council has a statutory duty to prepare and adopt a new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire by April 2025. More importantly, however, the Plan provides a major opportunity to shape the growth of Buckinghamshire over the next 15 – 20

years. The Plan will complement the work of the Buckinghamshire Growth Board on the Vision for Buckinghamshire and the Recovery and Growth Proposal, setting out the spatial vision and proposals for the growth of the area up to 2040 and beyond. It will identify areas for new housing and employment, while also designating areas for protection and enhancement, such as our valued landscapes, natural habitats and heritage.

- 2.3 The Plan will also be critical to the day-to-day decisions that the Council takes on planning applications, as once adopted (or significantly progressed), it is the prime consideration in those decisions. It will shape in detail not just where development takes place, but also the quality of new development and will secure the infrastructure (or funding for infrastructure) to support it.

Update on technical work and recent and proposed public engagement

- 2.4 Since the last update to the Committee in February 2023, the Planning Policy team has:
- a) Compiled and submitted a 10,000-word Council response to the government's Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy consultation in March 2023.
 - b) In conjunction with the Transport Strategy and Funding team, undertaken a public engagement survey on separate draft visions and objectives for the LP4B and the Local Transport Plan 5 between April – June 2023. We received about 700 responses to the LP4B vision and objectives which we are in the process of analysing and considering.
 - c) Begun to assemble a response to the government's Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: plan-making reform consultation which was published on 25 July and closes on 18 October 2023. The consultation document states that local plans should be vision-led, with visions specific to the place and running as a golden thread linking all the policies and site allocations. Visions should include measurable outcomes with links to wider corporate plans and strategies and a more robust monitoring framework. Local plans should also be the spatial articulation of a council's priorities as opposed to focusing on where and how much housing will be provided. All of this aligns with the work undertaken thus far on the LPB4, including the spring consultation on the draft vision and objectives.
 - d) Published an [interactive map and basic details](#) of the 1,000 or so sites which were submitted in response to two (and ongoing) Calls for Brownfield Sites and a Wider Call for Sites, which closed in September 2022. We are assessing these sites for their suitability, availability and achievability (including viability) to accommodate development to inform the first Buckinghamshire Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment

(HELAA). Ongoing work on this will inform the next programmed public engagement in early 2024, subject to Cabinet approval. This will be on possible high-level growth scenarios for the spatial distribution of new development to meet the assessed levels of housing and employment needed over the plan period.

e) Continued to assemble the evidence needed to support the Plan. Whilst much of this remains in draft or is not yet commissioned, we have completed and published a [Scoping Report for the Sustainability Appraisal](#) of the Local Plan together with a [Habitats Regulations Assessment Scoping Report](#) (both March 2023). These reports provide important environmental baseline information that will inform the future preparation of spatial options and policy drafting for the Plan. In addition, work is well advanced on the:

- Employment and Retail Land Review
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1 and Water Cycle Study
- Climate Change Study
- Local Housing Needs Assessment
- Self-Build Needs Assessment
- Settlement Review
- Landscape Character Assessment update
- Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment

We expect to publish the above studies over the course of the next six – nine months. In addition, initial work has been undertaken on transport modelling and assessment, and baseline infrastructure.

Planning reforms and their consequences for the LP4B

- 2.5 Previous reports to members, member briefings and this Committee have highlighted the significant uncertainty that the government's current planning reforms have created in the preparation of the LP4B.
- 2.6 We have reported previously the fact that the government had published the [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill](#) ('LURB') in May 2022, whilst the report to the October 2022 meeting of this Committee set out the key considerations arising from this draft legislation for the LP4B. The government had anticipated that the LURB would receive Royal Assent in spring 2023, when it was also expected to publish an interim revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework. Neither of these happened.

- 2.7 The LURB has now reached an advanced stage in its passage through Parliament – it is currently at the Report stage in the House of Lords, to which it will return in September 2023 following the summer recess. Our best estimate is that it will now obtain Royal Assent, and therefore become law, by the end of 2023.
- 2.8 In the light of the LURB’s progression through Parliament, the government has recently confirmed its intention to have in place the regulations, policy and guidance needed to enable the preparation of the first new-style local plans by autumn 2024. This deadline is contingent upon Royal Assent of the LURB as well as Parliamentary approval of the relevant regulations. If these are both achieved, the proposed mandatory 30-month timeframe to prepare and put in place a local plan would commence in earnest in autumn 2024, implying that the LP4B could reach adoption by quarter two of 2027.
- 2.9 The government has also confirmed its previously expressed intention that the latest date for plan-makers to submit local plans for examination under the current plan-making system will be 30 June 2025. We have twice considered whether it would be feasible to progress the Plan under the existing legislation to meet this transitional deadline. We concluded that it would not be realistic to do so, particularly given the commitment to consult on a draft Plan in our [Statement of Community Involvement](#).
- 2.10 If, for any reason, the proposed new plan-making system is not introduced, no abortive work on the Plan will have been undertaken thus far and we shall revise the programme to align with the existing legislation, national policy and guidance.

3. Other options considered

- 3.1 Not applicable at this stage.

4. Legal and financial implications

- 4.1 The statutory instrument which brought Buckinghamshire Council into being requires the Council to have a Local Plan in place by April 2025. At present, this must be prepared in accordance with the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#). However, as noted above, legislative change is on the horizon with the [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill](#). We have briefed the Committee before on the uncertainties associated with this process.
- 4.2 Our own internal legal advice has indicated that there are no formal penalties if the Council does not have an adopted Plan by April 2025. Nor are we aware of any sanctions which are likely to be imposed by the government. We have twice sought reassurance and confirmation on this from DLUHC, unfortunately without response. The policies in the Council’s existing local plans will continue to apply, though they

will continue to carry less weight in determining planning applications as they age or become inconsistent with national planning policy.

- 4.3 A £3m budget has been included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan to fund the preparation of the Plan (£750,000 pa from 2021-22 to 2024-25). To date, we have spent approximately £220,000 (or 7.3%) of the £3m as the majority of spending on local plans is incurred towards the latter stages of the process (e.g., on the Planning Inspector's, legal and consultancy fees for the public examination). We think £3m is still a sufficient budget to deliver the Local Plan, but we will keep it under review pending future planning reforms.
- 4.4 The delivery of the Local Plan aspirations will be resourced principally from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts in the West, South and East planning areas (with a review underway of whether CIL should similarly be introduced in the North and Central areas or county-wide) and planning obligations. The adoption of the Plan will also provide a robust justification for bidding for forward funding from grant or lending sources. Having an up-to-date Plan in place will also facilitate the development management process, which should lead to fewer planning appeals and / or dismissal of appeals, together with their associated costs and unwanted effects.

5. Corporate implications

- 5.1 The LP4B will be instrumental in delivering Corporate Plan priorities such as increasing prosperity, strengthening our communities and improving our environment. It will support the ambitions of the Buckinghamshire Strategic Vision by creating the conditions for successful businesses, vibrant and connected places, and a thriving culture, heritage and natural environment.
- 5.2 The Plan presents a significant opportunity to reduce carbon consumption by locating development in the right places, such as town centres, and establishing initiatives to travel sustainably or reduce the need to travel. These support the 'regulatory' and 'enabling change' approaches of Buckinghamshire's [Climate Change and Air Quality Strategy](#).
- 5.3 The Council's land holdings present an opportunity to facilitate the delivery of development (where appropriate), generate value, and give the Council leverage in wider development negotiations.

6. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

- 6.1 The Planning Policy team has engaged, and will continue to engage, with Members through verbal and written briefings, creating the opportunity for Members to have any questions answered. In addition, an update on the Local Plan is provided as part

of the Planning & Environment Members' and Town & Parish Councils' quarterly forums.

- 6.2 The team also intends to engage with Town and Parish Councils through the Community Boards as the work on the LP4B develops, to support the identification of local priorities.

7. Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 7.1 It is important that the Council provides consistency and continuity in its communications with the public and that we coordinate efforts to ensure we avoid 'consultation fatigue' and follow the principles set out in the adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

- 7.1 The Planning Policy team is working towards public engagement in early 2024 on possible high-level growth scenarios for the spatial distribution of new development to meet the assessed levels of housing and employment needed over the plan period.

8. Next steps and review

- 8.1 Officers will continue to provide the Committee with progress updates on the Local Plan with the next report potentially scheduled for the April 2024 meeting. Officers will also provide an update to the Growth Board in March 2024 (meeting date to be confirmed).

9. Background papers

- 9.1 [Buckinghamshire Local Development Scheme \(December 2020\)](#)
- 9.2 [Statement of Community Involvement \(December 2021\)](#)
- 9.3 [Statement of Consultation for the Discovery and Exploration Phase for the new Local Plan for Buckinghamshire Attitudes Survey \(July 2022\)](#)
- 9.4 [Survey on the draft vision and objectives for the Local Plan for Buckinghamshire \(April – June 2023\)](#)

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 email to democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.



Report to Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee

Date:	7 September 2023
Title:	Update report regarding Housing Standards in particular to address issues pertaining to Damp and Mould across Buckinghamshire
Cabinet Member(s):	Cllr Mark Winn – Cabinet Member for Homelessness and Regulatory
Service Contact officer:	Jacqui Bromilow, Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	That the Committee note content of this report

1. Background

- 1.1 In November 2022, a coroner published a judgment that outlined that a 2-year-old boy, Awaab Ishak, died from a respiratory condition caused by exposure to mould in the family home in Rochdale, which was rented accommodation. The Council was saddened to hear of what happened in Rochdale. It is recognised that the judgment of the coroner was unusually specific in the fact that the causative factor for the death was outlined to be damp and mould within the property.
- 1.2 In February 2023, a report was presented to the Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee outlining the known issues within Buckinghamshire along with the approach the council was taking in respect to housing standards, particularly highlighting the work regarding damp and mould.
- 1.3 The committee requested an update report be brought back to the September meeting. This paper provides a review of the volume of cases that occurred during the winter period 2022/2023 and works that have been undertaken in preparation for the upcoming winter period.

2. Review of Issues Winter 2022/2023

- 2.1 The Environmental Health service receives and responds to residents' concerns regarding domestic dwelling condition issues. Demand for the service usually sees cyclical variations which are seasonally dependent, in particular over the winter months where there are increases in reports of issues relating to damp and mould and/or heating systems.
- 2.2 Following last year's Coroner's Judgment in Rochdale, there were high levels of media interest concerning housing standards nationally and the Government launched a number of media campaigns raising awareness about housing conditions and the danger of mould. Many of these campaigns focused on providing information to social housing tenants and explaining the routes for redress that were open to them.
- 2.3 In 2022/23 there were 211 requests for service which related to issues concerning the hazards of damp and mould and/or excess cold (usually absent or broken heating systems). The previous year there were 99. This is an increase of over 100% in demand.
- 2.4 As part of the investigation process in many cases an assessment will be undertaken as per the Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme as outlined in the Housing Act 2004. The outcome of this assessment provides a number of enforcement options which include providing advice, serving a hazard awareness notice, an Improvement Notice or a Prohibition Order (which gives a period of time for the property or part of the property not to be used) or in cases where a property may present imminent harm an Emergency Prohibition Order.
- 2.5 Where formal enforcement action is instigated, there is a period of time for compliance and the Council will monitor the works after the compliance period has passed. The time period for improvement notices must be reasonable for the works which are required. If the enforcement requirements are not met then we will consider an escalation in line with the Enforcement Policy which may involve the issuing of a Civil Penalty Notice or prosecution in court. Where works are not completed the council will consider doing the works and charging the recipient of the notice for the costs incurred. The case officer will keep the resident informed. Any formal action may be appealed by the recipient of the notice or order which may cause delays until the issue is remedied.
- 2.6 With respect to enforcement activity, in 2022/23 there were 82 Improvement Notices served and 4 Prohibition Orders made. This included 44 Improvement Notices (54% of the total issued) and 3 of the Prohibition Orders (75% of the total) citing damp and mould and/or excess cold.

- 2.7 Of the 82 Improvement Notices served last year, 7 were served on social landlords (8.5% of the total) as well as two of the three Prohibition Orders. All of this activity, except one improvement notice, related to the same social housing provider. The Council is actively engaged with that organisation to address these critical issues and improve housing standards. The organisation has provided officers with direct contact details for a number of people to improve lines of communication. There are also updates being received on outstanding cases.

3. Preparations for Winter 2023/24

- 3.1 Opportunity Bucks is the Council's flagship programme to improve opportunities for people in Buckinghamshire. It is the local response to the Government's Levelling Up White Paper which was published in February 2022.
- 3.2 The programme focuses on 10 Wards in Buckinghamshire where people are experiencing the most hardship (3 in Aylesbury, 1 in Chesham and 6 in High Wycombe)
- 3.3 One of the workstreams regarding the programme addresses 'Standard of Living' which includes projects concerning housing standards and conditions.
- 3.4 In most cases, issues concerning the standard of rented accommodation can generally only be reported by the tenant themselves, although there may be any number of other professionals who may identify possible issues in a residence. For these public sector and other partners who may identify an issue (health visitor, someone from the police or fire service etc.), a new reporting system is under development so that these issues can be actioned and appropriately followed up by enforcement officers. This reporting system is not designed to replace existing processes such as those concerning homelessness or safeguarding.
- 3.5 The Energy Doctor is a scheme funded by the Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and delivered by the Council. Households need to meet certain criteria where they are owner occupied or privately rented, have an income of £30,000 or less, and be in receipt of a qualifying means tested benefit to qualify. Where these households are in a property which has an Energy Performance Certificate of D or below (or does not legally require a certificate for example an HMO) they are eligible for a home visit, will be provided with energy efficiency advice and can receive new low-cost energy efficiency measures/devices. Priority is given to those in Opportunity Bucks wards.
- 3.6 Communication Campaign – It has been recognised that the media attention that came about following Awaab Ishak's death raised awareness of the issues associated with damp and mould and poor housing standards in general.

- 3.7 The Council runs social media campaigns over the winter months providing self-help advice for energy and information for those in rented accommodation on reporting mechanisms where they have concerns on the conditions in their homes. There will be a specific press release in the autumn advising residents on how to report issues (mould) and advice for households on measures they can take themselves to manage moisture in their homes. Where landlords fail to address issues, the Council has an enforcement role through environmental health which may legally require improvement or other remedies. The Council is mindful of ensuring that the most vulnerable households across the county have access to the appropriate information, support and access to our services.
- 3.8 In addition to social media channels, materials in 'hard-copy' will be developed which can be distributed to residents who require that format.
- 3.9 Where Councillors or other community leaders become aware of a potential issue, they are advised to refer these the Council's Environmental Health Service. This will entail a contact from an officer, additional evidence gathering. If necessary, an officer may carry out an investigation/inspection and take action as is necessary.
- 3.10 It's likely that the Government will run national campaigns on these home condition issues as took place last year but the Council does not have any current information on that. Where necessary local media campaigns would be aligned to any national ones.
- 3.11 Landlords Forum –The Council plays a role in supporting and encouraging landlords in the private sector to ensure their housing stock is of good quality and is well maintained. In conjunction with the National Residential Landlords Association, a landlord forum is scheduled to take place this autumn. At this forum, the Council will be raising the critical issue of damp and mould with landlords directly to support them to meet their property standard responsibilities.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The Council will continue to focus on this critical issue as it is recognised that there are clear links between housing and health.
- 4.2 The Council is tracking new legislation as it emerges from Government regarding housing conditions and enforcement.
- 4.3 The Council will continue to carefully monitor trends on volume of new reported issues and service requests and respond accordingly within resources available.

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Growth, Infrastructure and Housing Select Committee (Chairman: David Carroll, Scrutiny officer: Tom Fowler)

Date	Topic	Description & Purpose	Lead Officer	Contributors
7th September 2023	Housing Standards	Update on actions taken by Buckinghamshire Council and Registered providers to address Mould & Damp in rented accommodation	Lisa Michelson/Jacqui Bromilow	Mark Winn
	Local Plan Update	To review the progress made on the establishment of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan	Steve Bambrick/Darran Eggleton	Peter Strachan
	Visitor Economy Update	Update on progress towards the Visitor Economy Strategy	Richard Ambrose/Matt Broadbent	Martin Tett/Rachael Matthews/Clive Harriss
23 rd November 2023	Planning Performance	Including determination of applications (delegated and committee), extension of time and appeal numbers/decisions (including committee)	Steve Bambrick/Darran Eggleton	Peter Strachan
	Regeneration Framework & Strategies	To review the Bucks Regeneration Framework, as well as the Aylesbury, Wycombe and Chesham Regeneration Strategies.	Richard Ambrose	Martin Tett
	Housing Strategy	To review the Housing Strategy.	Lisa Michelson	Mark Winn
15 th February 2024	Buckinghamshire Place Based Growth Model Update	Review the implementation and functioning of the new Growth Board and its 4 sub-boards.	Richard Ambrose/Steve Bambrick	Martin Tett
	CIL/106 update & Planning Committee performance	CIL/106 update & Planning Committee performance - including numbers of applications, type of applications, over-turns, appeals and cost awards	Steve Bambrick/Darran Eggleton	Peter Strachan

18 th April 2024	NPPF Update	<i>To update the committee on changes made to the National Planning Policy Framework</i>	Steve Bambrick/Darran Eggleton	Peter Strachan
	Local Plan Update	<i>To update the committee on the progress of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan</i>	Darran Eggleton/John Cheston	Peter Strachan