

Test Valley Borough Local Plan – Refined Issues and Options Consultation

Report of the Planning Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

1. That the Test Valley Borough Local Plan Refined Issues and Options document, attached as Annex 1 to the report, be published for public consultation.
2. That a revision be made to the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning to add an addendum to reflect temporary revised consultation arrangements, to apply whilst coronavirus restrictions are in place, as set out in Annex 2 to the report.
3. That the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development, in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder, be authorised to make changes of a minor nature to improve the presentation of and correct typographical errors in Annex 1 and Annex 2 prior to publication.

SUMMARY:

- The purpose of this report is to seek approval for public consultation the Council's proposed Local Plan Refined Issues and Options document.
- It also seeks approval of a proposed revision to the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning to add an addendum reflecting temporary revised consultation arrangements whilst coronavirus restrictions are in place.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Local Plan is a key policy document of the Council, setting out the planning framework for the Borough together with implementing the spatial aspects of the Council's priorities, as set out in the Corporate Plan. It also seeks to reflect the aspirations of our communities.
- 1.2 The current Local Plan was adopted in January 2016 and covers the period up to 2029. In June 2018, the Council approved for consultation an Issues and Options document, as the first stage in the next Local Plan's preparation. The consultation was undertaken between 6 July and 14 September 2018. The responses to this consultation have been published on the Council's website.
- 1.3 The Council approved an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) in January 2020, setting out the future timetable for the preparing the next Local Plan. The Refined Issues and Options document is the latest stage in the plan preparation process.

- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Refined Issues and Options document to be published for public consultation. It also seeks approval for an addendum to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (SCI) to reflect temporary revised consultation arrangements whilst coronavirus restrictions are in place.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Borough Local Plan is the statutory document which provides the spatial vision for the future of Test Valley in land use and planning terms. It will set out the level of new homes, jobs and infrastructure to be provided to support the Borough's communities and meet their future needs, whilst also protecting the local environment. It will also set out planning policies which will be used as the starting point for determining planning applications. The Local Plan is therefore a key policy document for the Council, setting out the planning framework for the future of the Borough. It also helps implement the spatial aspects of the Council's priorities and delivery of infrastructure, as set out in the Corporate Plan.
- 2.2 Together with establishing the land use framework for the Borough the Local Plan acts as a delivery tool for meeting the Council's and our communities' aspirations. The Council is working collaboratively with our communities and wider stakeholder in preparing the next Local Plan and in informing its content and priorities alongside meeting the requirements of the Government policy as set out in national planning guidance.
- 2.3 As a non statutory 'stepping stone' stage the Refined Issues and Options document sets out:
- (a) What has happened recently and what is currently underway which is of relevance
 - (b) Headline feedback from the Issues and Options consultation
 - (c) The issues which we be focusing on in preparing the next Local Plan
- 2.4 The key issues include: meeting housing needs, supporting economic growth and a prosperous local economy including the future of our town centres, protecting the environment and ensuring a high quality of life, and delivering infrastructure and community facilities. Climate change is a theme which runs throughout the document.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The Local Plan is a key policy document for the Council in respect of delivering our corporate objective set out within the Corporate Plan 2019-2023 'Growing our Potential' approved in April 2019, setting our vision and four strategic priorities. The next Local Plan will set out the planning policy framework for protecting and enhancing the environment, and making provision for new housing, employment, community facilities and infrastructure, other land uses, to meet the development needs of our communities.

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 In drafting the Refined Issues and Options document, officers have built upon the feedback received in the responses made to the previous Issues and Options consultation, with regard to the potential priorities and policy approaches to be considered at future stages. Account has also been taken of other major activities being undertaken by the Council and in association with our partners. This includes of particular significance our declaration of a climate emergency in September 2019 and subsequent preparation of a Climate Change Action Plan, and the masterplanning underway for both Andover town centre, and for Romsey south of town centre, through Romsey Future and involving the citizens' assembly.
- 4.2 The consultation document (Annex 1 to the report) has been drafted with the aim of engaging with a wide range of communities, third parties and interest levels. Wherever possible the technical language has been kept to a minimum. Inevitably, given the range of issues which the Borough faces and which the next Local Plan needs to cover, the document is lengthy.
- 4.3 The document uses similar chapter headings to those of the previous Issues and Options consultation and reflecting on the priorities of the Corporate Plan and other key projects. In particular, greater scope and detail has been added on climate change, town centres (including masterplanning underway) and infrastructure. Each chapter includes the key topics and policies which the next Local Plan needs to address as individual issues and as parts of its overall strategy and approach to responding to priorities.
- 4.4 Consultation was scheduled in the LDS for 2020 Quarter 1 and consultation on planning policy documents should take place in with the processes and methods as set out in the Council's Statement of Community Involvement in Planning 2017 (SCI). In section 5 of the SCI sets out the requirements for consulting on the local plan documents, including notifications and publishing details on websites/local media. However, there are elements that are impractical to be undertaken due to current coronavirus restrictions:
- Hard copies of document unable to be placed on deposit for public reference at receptions and libraries
 - Officers unable to attend face to face meetings with parish councils, stakeholders or hold exhibitions or workshops. This is at odds with our 'community focussed' approach to planning and other corporate documents.
- 4.5 On 13 May, the Government issued revised Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on the review and update of SCI in light of coronavirus restrictions and the implications which these have for plan making and the ability to comply with SCI policies. The PPG advocates that *"The local planning authority should then make any temporary amendments that are necessary to allow plan-making to progress, and continue to promote effective community engagement by means that are reasonably practicable"*.

- 4.6 In order to address this issue and in taking account of our equality duty, additional or enhanced consultation methods can be undertaken through the greater use of social media and the use of digital and virtual tools where possible. We will also look to see how we can best engage with community and voluntary groups who are have contact with and are supporting vulnerable groups or those who are self isolating and shielding. Planning officers will work jointly with both the Council's Communication and Community teams, on how inclusive engagement with the consultation can most effectively be achieved.
- 4.7 Additionally, the consultation period would normally be six weeks. A longer consultation period is proposed in order to take account of the current exceptional circumstances. This will allow more time for the consultation to be publicised to raise awareness of the consultation and for community and organisations to be able to respond.
- 4.8 Approval is therefore also sought for a revision to the SCI to add an addendum (Annex 2 to the report) reflecting temporary revised consultation arrangements whilst coronavirus restrictions are in place. These would be strictly time limited and would cease to apply as soon as safe to do so.
- 4.9 The SCI does state that where fundamental changes take place that warrant a fresh SCI public consultation will be undertaken. As this would be a temporary change in light of the current exceptional circumstances it is not proposed to consult on the change. In any event, it would be impractical to consult on the SCI as the Council has done previously.

5 Options

- 5.1 The consideration is whether or not to publish the Refined Options document for public consultation in the light of the current circumstances.

6 Option Appraisal

- 6.1 The principle of a Refined Issues and Options stage was included within the LDS approved in January 2020. In light of the current exceptional circumstances caused by Coronavirus and the unknown length that these will continue, there is a need to consider what is now the most suitable way to proceed. A balance need to be struck between continuing to make progress, whilst mindful of how public consultation can be appropriately conducted without groups being at a disadvantage. MHCLG have published advice on progressing with plan making:

“We understand that local planning authorities may also be concerned about the implications of COVID-19 on their capacity to prepare and progress local plans and support neighbourhood planning. We encourage all local planning authorities to continue, as much as possible, to work proactively with their community and other stakeholders to progress plans, even if some adjustments to timetables are necessary”

- 6.2 The recommended approach is to proceed with public consultation on the next stage in order to demonstrate progress and maintain momentum, but doing so in a manner which in so far as is reasonably practical, adapted to take account of the unique circumstances at present.
- 6.3 The alternative is not to proceed with public consultation in the present circumstances. However, it is not known how long coronavirus restrictions may endure, as they begin to be revised and relaxed. In light of Government advice and the need to make progress in line with the LDS, it is considered that this can be undertaken appropriately. It should also be recognised that this is a non statutory stage in the process and does not include consultation on proposed specific policy wording or development allocations.

7 Risk Management

- 7.1 Failure to agree and implement up to date strategic and local planning documents is recorded as a risk in the Council's Corporate Risk Register. A factor affecting this risk is the time frame for consultation on the key documents informing the Local Plan and the establishment of milestones for the production of the draft Local Plan. Progressing with preparation of the plan and undertaking public consultation on the Refined Issues and Options, whilst doing so in a manner which reflects the implications of the current exceptional circumstances due to coronavirus, would minimise this risk.

8 Resource Implications

- 8.1 The principal resource in preparing the next Local Plan is significant time required from officers within the Planning Policy and Economic Development Service and the support required from other services. The cost of delivery, including the commissioning of specialist studies required to update the evidence base, will be met from existing resources.

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Council is required to prepare a local plan and for this to be kept up to date, with its policies reviewed at least every five years post adoption. The Refined Issues and Options consultation is a non statutory stage in the local plan preparation process.

10 Equality Issues

- 10.1 An EQIA has been undertaken in light of coronavirus restrictions and the potential consequences these have for undertaking public consultation. Account has been taken of the temporary revised consultation arrangements set out in an addendum to the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (SCI). This aims to minimise the impacts through the use of revised consultation methods and an extended consultation period.

11 Other Issues

- 11.1 Community Safety – N/A

- 11.2 Environmental Health Issues – N/A
- 11.3 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate – Sustainability is a fundamental element of the planning system and is incorporated within any future planning decision. Both mitigation of the impact of development on climate change, and adaption to the impacts of climate change, will be key issues which the next local plan will seek to reflect throughout, and address as relevant to its planning policies and development proposals.
- 11.4 Property Issues – N/A
- 11.5 Wards/Communities Affected - All

12 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 12.1 The report seeks the approval to publish the Local Plan Refined Issues and Options document for public consultation and a revision to the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning to add an addendum reflecting temporary revised consultation arrangements whilst coronavirus restrictions are in place.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

Test Valley Borough Local Plan 2016

Test Valley Gypsy and Traveller DPD (Regulation 18 consultation draft) 2015

Test Valley Issue and Options consultation for the next Local Plan 2018

Test Valley Local Development Scheme 2020

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	2	File Ref:	pp1.2
(Portfolio: Planning) Councillor N Adams-King			
Officer:	Graham Smith/David Bibby	Ext:	8141/8105
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	17 June 2020