

**TO: THE EXECUTIVE
10 MAY 2016**

**BRACKNELL FOREST COMPREHENSIVE LOCAL PLAN – ISSUES AND OPTIONS
CONSULTATION**

Director of Environment, Culture and Communities

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Comprehensive Local Plan (CLP) will set out a planning framework for the Borough, including the allocation of sites for the period to 2036. This report seeks approval of the CLP Issues and Options document (see Appendix A to this report) for publication for a period of public consultation between Monday 13 June and Monday 25 July 2016. Approval of a consultation strategy is also sought (see Appendix B to this report).

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Executive agrees the Issues and Options document (Appendix A) and Consultation Strategy (Appendix B).
- 2.2 That, subject to Executive accepting the recommendation set out at 2.1 above, the Issues and Options document (Appendix A) and other supporting consultation material be published for a period of public consultation starting on Monday 13 June and ending on Monday 25 July.
- 2.3 That minor changes to the Issues and Options document and other supporting consultation material be agreed with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport in consultation with the Chief Officer Planning, Transport and Countryside.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is important that the Council has an up to date and robust planning framework to guide development which reflects current national policy and guidance. The preparation of the CLP will ensure that this is in place.
- 3.2 The CLP must be prepared in consultation with the local community and other stakeholders. This consultation will allow early engagement to help inform the next stage of the Plan. Preparation of the CLP will support the priorities set out in the Council Plan 2015 – 2019, in particular; ‘A strong and resilient economy’ and ‘A clean, green, growing and sustainable place’.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 It is a statutory requirement under the planning regulations to carry out proper consultation on the preparation of Local Plans, although early engagement methods are not prescribed in legislation. One option would be not to undertake this early stage and move directly to engagement on a draft Plan. However, this is likely to result in a greater level of potential concern and objection from both the local

community and other key stakeholders at later stages of the Plan if there has not been a chance to have an early input into the process.

- 4.2 The option of not preparing the CLP would leave the Council vulnerable to a pattern of development in the Borough being led by developers and landowners through planning applications and potential appeals as policies and allocations would not be up to date.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 The timetable for the preparation of the CLP was agreed by Executive in June 2015, through the Local Development Scheme. This identified that the reasons for preparing a CLP included:
- Loss of the regional context for the role of Bracknell Forest, following the partial revocation of the South East Plan;
 - To respond to the wider economic context particularly through the role and work of the Local Enterprise Partnership;
 - To ensure compliance and consistency with national planning policy and guidance
 - To inform the development of Neighbourhood Plans;
 - To provide a robust and up to date evidence base to support planning decisions/defend appeals, and the Borough's planning policies and guidance framework (such as housing, gypsy and traveller needs, affordable housing, retail, employment, landscape and infrastructure).
- 5.2 The CLP timetable identifies that consultation on an Issues and Options document will take place in June/July 2016.

The Role of the CLP

- 5.3 The CLP will, once adopted, replace the following Local Plans:
- The Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan, 2002
 - The Core Strategy, 2008
 - The Site Allocations Local Plan, 2013
- 5.4 The CLP will provide a framework for guiding the location and level of development in the Borough up to 2036, and will include detailed policies to be used in determining applications for planning permission. The Plan will include a vision, objectives, and strategy for the level and distribution of development, including housing, economic and retail development and new infrastructure; site allocations and a suite of development management policies.
- 5.5 The CLP will be informed by national policy and guidance, other local plans and strategies and an extensive evidence base on issues such as housing and employment need, flood risk, travellers' needs, infrastructure requirements (including outputs from transport modelling), Green Belt (including the results of a review), landscape and open space. Much of the evidence is currently under way and further findings will be published during the process of preparing the new plan. In some

cases the evidence, along with the SA/SEA findings and the outcome of consultations, may result in changes to the suggested policy approaches.

The Issues and Options Document

5.6 The Issues and Options document (Appendix A) is a fairly technical document aimed at those involved in the planning and development sectors. As a result, a summary leaflet will also be prepared prior to the commencement of consultation, aimed at those who live and work in the Borough. The leaflet will present the key issues in a simpler form and include diagrams and maps.

5.7 Whilst the Issues and Options document covers a broad range of topics and issues (as set out below), it does not include possible sites for development, at this stage.

1. Introduction and Context

This sets out the scope of the CLP and the context within which it is being prepared. It also provides details of how to comment.

2. Vision and Objectives

This sets out the need to prepare a long term vision for the Borough and seeks views on an emerging vision and draft objectives. It is recognised that these may change as the plan progresses and more detail on the content of the Plan becomes available. The emerging vision is as follows;

By 2036 the Borough will have continued to grow sustainably, enjoying high levels of prosperity for residents and meeting the needs of modern business. It will be a great place to live and work. Well planned new development will include essential infrastructure improvements which are provided in the right locations at the right time. The positive image and cultural self confidence of the Borough will be evident, building further on the benefits of the large-scale redevelopment and revitalisation of Bracknell town centre. The Borough will remain a destination of choice for retail leisure and employment. The evolution of the Borough's towns, village and neighbourhood centres will continue to maintain and support distinct and diverse communities and meet local needs.

The housing needed to support the growing population and the economy will have been delivered in a well planned manner, seeking to ensure choice and affordability. Small, medium and large sites will be allocated to meet these needs on both brownfield and greenfield land¹. Development will be matched with the roads, schools, health facilities, usable green spaces and other infrastructure needed by those living in, working in, and visiting the Borough.

The needs of business will be planned for with the protection of key employment areas, which support some of the Borough's key employers. Changes in how people work and the needs of new and innovative business models will be planned for to ensure a diverse and thriving economy, encouraging people to live and work in the Borough.

¹ Greenfield land: Land which does not meet the definition of 'previously developed land'. It is usually land that is currently undeveloped.

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Communities will be encouraged to have a strong sense of their own identity and local distinctiveness, and they will plan for development at the local level through neighbourhood development plans. Quality of life for all will be protected and where possible enhanced. Important existing community facilities will be protected.

Development will respect the Borough's important landscape character and the countryside will be protected. Where development does happen it will be well designed and bring with it accessible high quality open space. Any impacts of development on designated areas such as the Thames Basin Heaths and the Green Belt will be mitigated. Planning policies will seek to prevent and mitigate environmental impacts including pollution and flooding, and any harmful effects of climate change. Valued heritage assets and their settings will be safeguarded.

3. Level of development

This sets out the need to undertake assessments of future development needs, particularly for housing, employment and retail uses. It also sets out the requirement to work with other relevant local authorities in identifying development needs.

To date, only a technical or objective assessment of housing needs (addressing the needs of different groups in the community including older people) has been completed. The Issues and Options document states that the objective assessment has identified a need for 635 dwellings per year (Use Class C3 which covers self contained dwellings) for Bracknell Forest between 2013 and 2036. The consultation document makes it clear that this is not the annual requirement that will be set in policy in the CLP. The final figure which could be higher or lower will be affected by other factors including possible unmet need from other local authorities together with environmental and physical constraints within the Borough. The document also refers to the fact that the final requirement will supersede that currently set out in the Core Strategy (Policy CS15) which requires an average of 557 dwellings per year. The latter is outdated as it is not based on an objective assessment of need, as now expected by national policy, and covers a different time period (2006 – 2026).

The document also sets out the results of the objective assessment of need for bedspaces in nursing homes and care homes (these fall within Use Class C2 or the category of residential institutions) for Bracknell Forest. A figure of 319 bedspaces is put forward for the period 2013 to 2036. This is in addition to the figure for self contained dwellings.

The need to assess and plan for the needs of travellers and to identify and plan for infrastructure provision alongside new development is also highlighted.

4. Spatial Strategy

At this stage, whilst the Issues and Options document does not identify the proposed level of future development in the Borough, it does set out options for, and seek views on, possible alternative approaches for distributing development. It also highlights other factors that might influence this distribution such as the future approach to the Green Belt, the identification of gaps and uses that require considerable land take such as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and open space.

5. Development Management Options

This section sets out a range of policy options on specific topics including the following:

- Development in the Green Belt or countryside (including policy options on Green Belt, countryside, landscape, gaps between settlements, rural workers dwellings and equestrian uses);
- Character and Design (including policy options on an overarching design policy and internal space standards for dwellings);
- Housing (including travellers and issues such as dwelling mix and specialist housing);
- Affordable Housing (including the threshold and percentage required on new development sites);
- Local Economy and Retail (including policy options relating to changes of use within retail areas, and protection of community facilities);
- Heritage and Conservation;
- Natural Environment (including policy options on nature conservation and the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area);
- Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability (this includes policies on pollution, contaminated land, flooding, drainage, and renewable energy);
- Transport;
- Infrastructure.

5.8 A range of Topic Papers have been prepared supporting the issues set out in the Issues and Options document. In addition, a Duty to Co-operate Framework has been compiled setting out the strategic planning issues which need to be addressed through joint working with appropriate duty to co-operate bodies.

Proposed Consultation

5.9 The Council is required by Regulations to undertake consultation with certain groups and organisations as part of the preparation of a Local Plan. The Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement also sets out that the Council will prepare a consultation strategy for each stage of a Local Plan. Taking these into account, a Consultation Strategy including a Consultation Mandate has been prepared for this stage of the CLP and are attached as Appendix B.

5.10 Consultation will run for a six week period prior to the summer holidays. It is proposed that it will start on Monday 13 June and end on Monday 25 July 2016. The consultation will involve the following:

- Notification to all those on the existing Planning Policy database;
- Making documents, including a 'plain English' leaflet, available on:
 - i) the Council's website and consultation portal, and,

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- ii) at the Time Square offices;
 - Making the CLP Issues and Options document and leaflets available at local libraries (where internet access is also available);
 - Sending hard copies to Town and Parish Councils and holding a Town and Parish Clerks' briefing;
 - Distributing information by way of Town and Country, a press release, alerts on social media, and a press advert in local newspapers;
 - Sending out consultation information via 'Involve' (which is a central support agency for local voluntary and community action groups within the Borough). This also includes the Council's Access Group;
 - Consulting those with business interests. The Council will send out consultation information via the Council's Business Enterprise Team.
- 5.11 Given that the Issues and Options consultation is the first main stage of the engagement process, and that further analysis needs to be undertaken before certain aspects of the plan can be prepared, (particularly consideration of potential sites for allocation for new homes and possibly other uses), exhibitions and face-to-face meetings with the local community are not considered appropriate at this stage. It is envisaged that the Council will publish for comments the potential sites submitted as a result of a 'call for sites' exercise and further requests through the Issues and Options consultation. This will be in the form of publicising the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) which assesses sites in terms of their deliverability and developability. It is hoped to do this in the Autumn, once the initial appraisal of potential sites has been undertaken.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Consultation on the CLP is required by the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). The provisions relating to the early consultation are covered by Regulation 18 and it is considered that undertaking the consultation as proposed will help fulfill the Council's obligations under this legislation.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 Funding of the work on the CLP, including the preparation of consultation material and process suggested in this report will be covered by the existing Planning Policy Budget Allocation with staff being funded from within the existing Planning Policy Budget.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 An Equalities Impact Screening Record Form is attached as Appendix C.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The Strategic Risk Register (2015) includes Risk 10 which identifies the risk of not working effectively with key partners or residents in the development of services.

Such a risk could mean that community needs are not met and a negative impact on community cohesion. The production of an up to date CLP will involve extensive engagement with stakeholders and residents in order to identify local needs. Risk 11 identifies the risk of being unable to implement legislative changes. The production of the CLP allows recent legislative changes to be reflected within the Local Plan.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 The preparation of the Issues and Options document has involved preparing papers on topics and evidence covered by the document. These have been referred to and considered by the Local Plan Working Group (exempt information). No other groups have been consulted on the preparation of this report. However, the report seeks agreement to a consultation strategy (see Appendix B) to carry out engagement on the CLP Issues and Options consultation document.
- 7.2 In addition, engagement with key stakeholders is already on-going as part of the preparation of the evidence base and in order to meet the 'duty to co-operate'. Specific consultations on a 'duty to co-operate' framework; and the scope of the CLP (what the plan should contain) took place between 21 October and 2 December 2015. Briefings have already been provided to individual Parish Councils on the broad timetable for the CLP. The Parish Liaison Group has also been briefed and a recent article in Town and Country (Spring 2016) advertised this forthcoming opportunity to get involved in the development of the Local Plan.

Appendices

- A – Comprehensive Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation Document
- B – Consultation Strategy and Consultation Mandate
- C – Equalities Impact Screening Form

Background Papers

Council Plan 2015 – 2019

Statement of Community Involvement (February 2014)

Local Development Scheme 2015 – 2018 (June 2015)

Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (February 2016)

Contact for further information

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