

TITLE	Local Plan Update - Issues and Options Consultation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 28 July 2016
WARD	None Specific
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment
LEAD MEMBER	Mark Ashwell, Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Local Plan will provide a robust strategy for well-designed development, which will help to regenerate the Borough's towns and villages, support social and economic prosperity, whilst encouraging economic growth. The Issues and Options stage is the first formal engagement opportunity to ensure that the community are able to influence the LPU.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is asked to:

- 1) approve the Issues and Options report for consultation for an eight week period together with publishing supporting documents;
- 2) authorise the Director of Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to agree minor changes to the Local Plan Update Issues and Options stage and other supporting documents prior to consultation. (Any minor modifications would consist of non-material alterations such as rewording and correction of typing errors).

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council needs to ensure that it has an up to date and robust planning framework to guide development in the Borough up to 2036. This is the purpose of the Local Plan Update and the Issues and Options stage is the first formal engagement stage in its preparation.

The Issues and Options document will include consultation about the vision and objectives; approach to development known as the 'spatial strategy', as well as other topic areas, including housing, employment, character and design, transport, infrastructure, services and facilities

The responses to this consultation will then be considered to help inform the next stage of the Local Plan process, which will be known as the Preferred Options report.

Background

The timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan Update was originally agreed by Executive in May 2015. Since that time, the Council has been undertaking early engagement and has significantly progressed the evidence base to help inform the Local Plan Update.

The production of the Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has been a key part of the work that has been carried out so far. The SHMA sets out the housing need across what is known as the Housing Market Area (HMA).

The LPU for Wokingham Borough cannot be prepared in isolation from the plans that are being prepared by other authorities; particularly those that are within the Western Housing Market Area. The authorities which are within the Western Housing Market Area (HMA) are Bracknell Forest, Reading and West Berkshire and the first consideration is whether the overall HMA housing need can be met within the HMA. Furthermore, questions such as the mix of housing, i.e. the sizes and types of housing may also need to be considered at this larger geographical area.

The Council has already been working closely with other authorities in terms of jointly producing evidence base and this is expected to continue as the Local Plan Update is progressed.

The Issues and Options consultation seeks peoples' views on producing a Local Plan Update, including what the Vision and Objectives should be and what topics the plan should cover, i.e. Housing; employment; transport; infrastructure, services and facilities

The Council already has two key planning policy documents that contain planning policies. These are:

- The Core Strategy (adopted 2010) – containing the overarching strategic policies (for example setting the number of new houses to be built)
- The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted 2014), which includes adding extra detail to the policies within the Core Strategy

The intention of the Local Plan Update will be to replace some of the policies in these documents, for example the housing target. Other policies will need to be updated. The reasons for this include the need to reflect changes in guidance at a national level, new evidence.

However, some of the policies are relatively recent, and if they still accord with Government policy and local circumstances then these may not need to be superseded.

Analysis of Issues

The Council has already received some initial views about what the Local Plan Update might contain. Such views have been gathered through the publication of the different evidence bases as well as on-going meetings such as those with Parish and Town Councils.

The primary purpose of the Issues and Options stage is to get a good understanding from the community about what the LPU should cover.

The Council will be publishing on 21 September 2016 a list and map of the sites that have been suggested to the Council to potentially allocate in response to the Call for Sites. It should be noted that many of these sites may not be suitable, available or able to be delivered / developed and therefore just because a site is on the list, there is no guarantee it will be allocated. All of the sites submitted in response to the Call for Sites will be assessed using the methodology set out in the Housing and Economic Land Availability (HELAA). Only the sites that are considered to be suitable, available and deliverable will be allocated for development within the Local Plan Update.

The Issues and Options document does not propose sites for allocation. The Preferred Options stage (the next stage) will refine the spatial strategy options. However, the intention is that proposed allocation of sites will take place at the Proposed Submission stage, as the Council wants to make sure that we consider all of the comments (known as 'representations') following the Issues and Options stage and also the Preferred Options stage before making recommendations about potential site allocations. See the stages of the Local Plan process in Figure 1 of the Local Development Scheme on our website here:

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-policy-supporting-information/>

Consultation on the Issues and Options has to be for a minimum of six weeks. In light of school holidays, the consultation period has been extended to eight weeks to run from 5 August 2016 to 4pm on 30 September 2016. The school holidays do provide a good opportunity to engage the community at events that are running over this period. The consultation will be consistent with the Statement of Community Involvement, and will include the following:

- E-mail / post to all those people on database
- A series of events around the Borough
- Newsletter
- Social Media

Risk Management

The main risks relate to whether the Local Plan Update is ultimately found to be 'legally compliant' and 'sound' by a Planning Inspector who will conduct an independent public examination. This examination will include consideration of how the community have been engaged in the process of helping to shape the content of the LPU.

Legal compliance

In producing the Local Plan Update Issues and Options, the Authority had to assess whether the document was compatible with the legal requirements associated with plans of the authority. This included the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2012; the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004; the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010; the Human Rights Act; compliance with Directives of the European Commission and subsequent UK Regulations and ensuring that no segment of the Borough's community was likely to be unfairly penalised.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1) 2016/17	circa £300k	Yes – the costs of producing the LPU will be covered by the existing budget, which is £800k, therefore covering the circa £760k, which is expected to be spent in the future.	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2) 2017/18	circa £90k		
Following Financial Year (Year 3) 2018/19	circa £370k		
	Total - £760k	Please note that these same figures are used in the Local Development Scheme (LDS) Executive Report	

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The table above sets out the project costs associated with producing the Local Plan Update.

A special item of up to £800,000 has been included in the Medium Term Financial Plan for the period from 2015 – 2018 for the Local Plan Update although this budget can be re-profiled to reflect the altered timescales for the LPU.

This is a multi-year project and therefore the costs will be spread across a number of financial years, the exact timing of which will be subject to external influences such as the Planning Inspectorate's availability for the Public Examination. The profile of the budget may vary according to other factors but can be covered by existing agreed budgets.

Cross-Council Implications

The Local Plan Update is an opportunity to creatively meet the needs of Wokingham Borough in a number of different areas, including housing, education, health & well-being, etc. As such, other services are involved in the production of the Local Plan Update and supporting information, largely through the engagement of key internal champions.

List of Background Papers

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Sustainability Appraisal incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA including SEA)</i>• <i>Evidence Base Table</i> |
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Contact John Spurling	Service Environment
Telephone No 0118 974 6455	Email john.spurling@wokingham.gov.uk
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