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| TITLE | Local Plan Update (LPU), Options Development |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | The Executive on 27 July 2017 |
| WARD | None Specific |
| STRATEGIC DIRECTOR | Josie Wragg, Interim Director of Environment Graham Ebers, Director Corporate Services |
| LEAD MEMBER | David Lee, Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Highways |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Local Plan Update (LPU) will provide a robust strategy for managing development to ensure that it occurs in suitable and sustainable locations and that it is deliverable, well-designed, helping to regenerate towns and villages within the borough, support social and economic prosperity, whilst encouraging economic growth.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is advised to:

- 1) approve a supplementary estimate of £400k to support the site assessments process for the Local Plan Update; and
- 2) note the update to process.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The council needs to ensure that it has an up to date and robust planning framework to manage development in the borough. This is the purpose of the Local Plan Update, particularly given recent feedback by Planning Inspectors through appeal decisions.

Detailed work is required to assess the opportunities for sustainable development across all sites promoted to the local plan process. The number and nature of the promoted sites exceeded the expectations when setting the original budget for the Local Plan Update. Supplementary funding is required to support the assessment process, in particular the formulation of more in depth infrastructure delivery plans for larger sites, which was a theme of consultee responses to date.

These assessments will address all of the 260+ sites and will assist in choosing the future planning strategy. Future consultation on the Local Plan Update will be supported by the detailed assessment of all sites. This is effectively an options development phase where some sites or clusters of sites will be explored in more detail to fully understand their potential, some of which will be recommended for allocation for specific uses as part of a balanced strategy for delivery.

Background

Local Plans are the key documents through which local planning authorities can set out a vision and framework for the management of future development.

The council's current planning policies are set out in the [Core Strategy](#) (adopted 2010) and [Managing Development Delivery](#) (adopted 2014) plans.¹ Notwithstanding the relatively recent adoption of these plans, changes to national planning policy and guidance and associated commentary on appeal by Planning Inspectors in this theme necessitate their review.

The Local Plan Update will review and put in place up-to-date planning policies seeking to cover the period to 2036. It will replace both the Core Strategy and the Managing Development Delivery documents both of which look to the year 2026.² The timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan Update was originally agreed by Executive in July 2016.³

Geographical context and the duty to cooperate

Local Plans cannot be completed in isolation with many planning issues requiring discussion and cooperation over a wider area. The council has been and continues to work closely with other local authorities and other organisations. A number of joint evidence studies have been commissioned, notably those relating to the need for housing and economic development.

Core local authorities for engagement on housing and economic issues are set out in the table below. The council is already working closely with these local authorities to understand the scale of development needs and how these might best be met. This collaborative approach has been endorsed by the local authorities through the [West of Berkshire Spatial Planning Framework](#).

| Functional geography | Local authorities |
|---|--|
| Western Berkshire Housing Market Area | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bracknell Forest Council.• Reading Borough Council.• West Berkshire Council.• Wokingham Borough Council. |
| Central Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bracknell Forest Borough Council.• Reading Borough Council.• Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.• Wokingham Borough Council. |

¹ Separate, county-wide plans sets out planning policies for minerals and waste development.

² A separate process will review both the minerals and waste plans. This work is being undertaken jointly with Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and West Berkshire Council.

³ See the [Local Development Scheme](#) for further detail.

Studies looking at the future need for homes and jobs suggest that over the period 2013 to 2036 around 19,500 new homes (equates to 856 additional homes per annum)⁴ are required in Wokingham Borough. The level of housing needed in the future has been subject to challenge through the planning application appeal process. Inspector's when determining recent appeals, concluded that housing need is higher at 894 additional homes per year and pressure remains from further appeal challenges on this basis.

Studies on the need for homes and jobs will need to be robustly tested using updated information. Since the studies were undertaken, the government has published new 2014-based household projections. The government has also stated its intention in the housing white paper⁵ to introduce a new standard methodology for calculating housing needs.

Call for Sites

A key input to the local plan process is what land may be available for new housing, jobs and other uses such as leisure development.

The council made an open invitation for anyone to promote where land may be suitable for development through the 'call for sites' exercises in 2016. Through these exercises around 260 sites across Wokingham Borough have been promoted for consideration. The majority of sites have been promoted by the landowner or a developer. Details of promoted land are available on the council's website.⁶

Issues and Options Consultation

The council undertook an Issues and Options consultation over the summer 2016. The primary purpose of this consultation was to get an understanding from residents, businesses and other people on what the Local Plan Update should cover as well as how some issues might be approached.

A wider range of responses were received. A summary of the main issues raised by respondents was published on the council's website in January 2017 and is reproduced in Appendix A to this report. The following draws out the key messages.

- Respondents favoured using a combination of approaches to meeting development needs. The most supported individual approach was to utilise a small number of larger developments incorporating their own infrastructure and designed with regard to garden settlement principles.
- Respondents strongly supported the need to provide infrastructure alongside development, and preferably its early provision ahead of when it is needed.
- Respondents supported the protection of the green belt⁷ and countryside areas. There was recognition that previously developed sites in these areas might be suitable for redevelopment.

⁴ See the [Berkshire \(including South Bucks\) Strategic Housing Market Assessment February 2016](#). Since the publication of the SHMA there have been several appeal decisions where Inspectors have concluded that the level of housing need may be higher.

⁵ [Fixing Our Broken Housing Market, DCLG February 2017](#).

⁶ See 'Call for sites update' on the [Local Plan Update webpage](#).

⁷ Within Wokingham Borough the land situated to the north is designated part of the Metropolitan Green Belt surrounding London. Land elsewhere in the borough which is situated outside of the main built-up areas is considered countryside.

- Respondents acknowledged the need for some flexibility towards employment to allow adaptation to new ways of working (including technologies) and the growth of non-traditional businesses.

Analysis of Issues

The big challenge for the Local Plan Update is how to achieve high quality and sustainability whilst providing for new infrastructure, new jobs and new homes.

At the outset it is important to note that the strategy for the Local Plan Update must be deliverable. Options which are not supported by evidence will not succeed when tested at examination by an independent Planning Inspector.

The central aspect of the Local Plan Update is the spatial strategy. This will set out the answers to the three questions:

1. How much development is required?
2. Where should it go?
3. Where shouldn't it go?

The Council currently seeks to focus the majority of development in the four Strategic Development Locations, with a lesser level of development supported within towns and villages subject to consideration of accessibility and impacts. The Council specifically resists inappropriate 'backland development'. This approach means that the council manages the location and rate of development and has enabled significant new infrastructure to be delivered alongside to help mitigate impacts and to try to alleviate pressure on other areas.

The Local Plan Update will need to consider the future planning strategy. As part of this process all sites promoted to the local plan process will be assessed for their suitability, availability and achievability (deliverability).

The number and nature of the sites promoted to the local plan process have exceeded the expectations when setting the original budget for the Local Plan Update. With detailed work required to assess all the sites supplementary funding is required to support the assessment process. In particular some of the sites or clusters of sites are large and will need consideration of how they might best contribute to sustainability and quality objectives as well as what infrastructure might be required.

Larger and more complex sites require a proportionally more detailed assessment compared to smaller sites. Understanding the potential opportunities for sustainable development on larger and complex sites may require master planning to be undertaken. This ensures that analysis captures holistic impacts and opportunities, including identifying the correct infrastructure should the site be deemed suitable. The supplementary funding will support such analysis including engagement with stakeholders. Undertaking detailed work now provides residents and others with the opportunity to engage and influence assessments early in the local plan process, allowing us to address a number of lessons learned through the Core Strategy.

Future consultation on the preferred strategy will be supported by the detailed assessment of all sites, some of which will be recommended for allocation for specific uses as part of a balanced strategy for delivery.

Risk Management

The main risk is 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 Local Plan Update.

Legal compliance

In producing the Local Plan Update, the council has 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) 2017/18 | Circa £715k | £400k is required to progress the detailed site investigation works. Other costs for the LPU (671k) will be covered by the existing budget. | Revenue |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) 2018/19 | Circa £335k | | |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) 2019/20 | Circa £21k | | |
| | Total £1071k | | |

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

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

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 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 residents and business within 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

Attached to this Executive Report:

- *Issues and Options Consultation: The main issues raised*

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