

Agenda Item IMD3

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2021/03

TITLE	Slough – Local Plan Spatial Strategy consultation
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement - Wayne Smith
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	6 January 2021 Virtual meeting at 2pm
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Chris Trill

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

To consider the council's response to Slough Borough Council's 'Local Plan for Slough – Spatial Strategy consultation' running from 19 November 2020 to 11 January 2021 to ensure it has minimal negative impacts upon Wokingham Borough and that any benefits are maximised.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Planning and Enforcement agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submits the comments contained in this report as this council's response to the Slough Borough Council consultation 'Local Plan for Slough – Spatial Strategy consultation' (November 2020):

- 1) Support for Slough Borough Council's intent to meet housing needs within Slough Borough or within the related functional geography as identified;
- 2) Requests additional clarity on how employment figures have been derived and encourages that employment needs should be met in full within Slough or the related functional geography;
- 3) Requests continued engagement regarding Wider Area Growth Study, and other emerging evidence.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Slough Borough Council (SBC) is progressing a review of its planning policies through work on the emerging 'Local Plan for Slough'. The latest stage of consultation is on a proposed Spatial Strategy, which runs from 19 November 2020 to 11 January 2021. This report sets out a recommended response to the consultation.

SBC has identified a range of options to enable housing but, due to the constrained nature of the borough, is unable to meet the defined housing need in full. Using the government's standard method to calculate housing need, there remains an unmet need of approximately 5,000 dwellings over the plan period 2016 - 2036.

It is SBC's position that its unmet housing need should be accommodated in locations as close to Slough as possible, and within an area defined by the Wider Area Growth Study commissioned by SBC along with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

and South Bucks District Council and Chiltern District Council (now part of Buckinghamshire Council). There is no expectation for Wokingham Borough to accommodate any of the identified housing shortfall.

Additionally, the consultation sets out SBC's high-level approach for creating at least 15,000 jobs over the plan period. There are some uncertainties concerning how this figure has been derived and whether it is the intention of SBC to meet evidenced employment need in full across its functional geographic area.

This report recommends that Wokingham Borough Council response to the consultation should be to support SBC's position that needs arising from Slough Borough are met within that borough or within the surrounding authorities where there are functional links, and that clarification is sought regarding how the scale of jobs growth has been derived.

Background

Slough Borough Council (SBC) is progressing a review of its adopted planning policies. Currently the process is at an early stage.

SBC has now published a proposed spatial strategy for consultation. It sets out a vision and objectives, along with proposals for what the pattern, scale and quality of development will be. The consultation runs until 11 January 2021.

The proposed spatial strategy follows on from two earlier consultations:

- In January / February 2017 SBC undertook a formal Issues and Options consultation. This identified a number of options for development but concluded there to be no reasonable options, or combinations of options, which could accommodate all of Slough's housing and employment needs. The focus was for unmet need to be met as close as possible to Slough Borough.
- In June / July 2018 a targeted consultation was undertaken on an Interim Sustainability Appraisal of the Emerging Preferred Spatial Strategy. This interim preferred spatial strategy concluded that the majority of development could be located within Slough Borough with unmet needs being focussed in a northern extension of Slough into South Buckinghamshire.

The proposed spatial strategy is supported by a number of documents, including a Sustainability Appraisal and a 'Protecting the Suburbs Strategy' document.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

Context

Previous engagement concluded that SBC would be unable to meet housing needs as defined by the government's standard method for calculating Local Housing Need (LHN). SBC indicated that unmet need should be met close to Slough and this principle was supported by Wokingham Borough Council.

To address the issue of unmet needs, SBC along with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and South Bucks District Council and Chiltern District Council (now part of Buckinghamshire Council) commissioned a Wider Area Growth (WAG) Study. The WAG Study to date has considered the principle of where unmet need arising from Slough Borough could be met where house prices are no higher than in Slough Borough. It identified a narrow area of search within southern part of Buckinghamshire south of the M40 and the London Borough of Hillingdon.

A further part of the WAG Study has been commissioned. The purpose of this second part is to consider more specifically where unmet housing needs can best be accommodated within the defined area. The outcome of this second part is not yet known but is expected to be completed by the New Year.

Of additional note is that proposed spatial strategy no longer assumes that the expansion of Heathrow Airport will occur in the short or medium term and so associated issues are not addressed.

The proposed spatial strategy

The proposed spatial strategy does not provide any specific planning policies. Instead the focus is on describing the approach that is proposed for different issues and areas.

Housing

Using the standard method, LHN calculates a need for 17,860 dwellings in Slough Borough between 2016 and 2036 (approximately 893 dwellings per annum over the plan period). Accounting for completions over the period 2016-2020, the residual need over the remaining 16 years currently equates to 15,460 dwellings (approximately 966 dwellings per annum).

The preferred spatial strategy identifies a housing land supply of approximately 10,000 dwellings. It seeks to locate development in the most accessible locations that have the greatest capacity to absorb growth and deliver social and environmental benefits. The strategy comprises six key elements which can broadly be summarised as follows:

- Comprehensive redevelopment of Slough town centre – up to 9,000 dwellings;
- Sustainable brownfield development (predominantly commercial land) at Cippenham and Chalvey – exact capacity not quantified;
- Potential Green Belt release within Slough borough – 10 possible sites have been identified for further consideration to accommodate family housing. Further detailed work is required and a separate consultation is expected in 2021;
- Conserving the character of Slough's suburbs by protecting family housing – this approach is underpinned by evidenced which recognises that there are limited opportunities for additional housing capacity in suburban locations;
- Protecting the 'strategic gap' between Slough and Greater London – no housing development within this gap due to constraints and safeguarding of land for future Heathrow expansion;
- Promoting cross border expansion of Slough to provide approximately 5,000 homes as close as possible to Slough but in an, as yet, undefined area.

The preferred spatial strategy seeks to address housing need within the functional geography of Slough Borough, as identified by the WAG study. There is an identified shortfall of approximately 5,000 dwellings which is expected to be met within the area identified in the study. This does not include Wokingham Borough.

It is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council acknowledge the work undertaken by SBC and supports SBC's position that unmet development need should be met within the functional geography of Slough Borough, which is noted does not include Wokingham Borough. It is this council's strong belief that housing needs can only be met within the functional geography of the originating local authority. For provision to be made at locations beyond this, services no logical planning purpose and cannot be considered a reasonable alternative.

Whilst the government has consulted on a revised standard method, this is not yet material. Future work, consultations and plan versions of the plan will need to consider implications of any amended approach.

Employment

Previous evidence¹ identified that Slough Borough is located in a functional economic market area (FEMA) comprising Slough Borough, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and South Bucks District Council (now part of Buckinghamshire Council. The Eastern Berkshire FEMA Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) (2016) identified that 20,080 new jobs would be required in Slough Borough in the period 2013-2036 in order to meet the predicted increase in the labour supply based on predicted population growth.

There are a number of uncertainties regarding employment need and supply due to the third runway at Heathrow Airport no longer being deliverable in the short or medium term. Despite this, the spatial strategy proposes to accommodate a minimum 15,000 new jobs over the plan period. The consultation document does not make reference to the EDNA or specific employment evidence, and it is therefore not clear as to the justification for identifying the 15,000 jobs target is.

It is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council requests clarification on where this need figure has been derived from. It is also recommended that the employment development need of Slough Borough should be met in full within the functional geography of Slough, which is noted does not include Wokingham Borough.

Notwithstanding, the document states that the identification of locations for unmet employment needs falls under the scope of the WAG Study. It is therefore likely that as this evidence base develops there will be greater certainty in how needs will be met. It is therefore recommended that Wokingham Borough Council encourages SBC to continue to proactively investigate opportunities for meeting employment development needs in full across the study area and requests further engagement as this work moves forward.

Conclusion

In summary, it is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council welcomes the commitment of SBC to meet its housing need as close as possible to where needs arise, and requests SBC to continue to proactively engage with other local authorities as part of the WAG Study to support the understanding of both housing and employment development needs and how these will be addressed.

Due to the call in period for this report extending beyond the closure of the consultation, a holding response will be provided to SBC. Confirmation will be provided subsequently, following the closure of the call in period.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Not relevant	Not relevant

¹ The Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) Study (2016)

Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Not relevant	Not relevant
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Not relevant	Not relevant

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None anticipated

Cross-Council Implications
None anticipated

Public Sector Equality Duty
Due regard has been had to the Public Sector Equality Duty in reviewing and responding to this consultation.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No comments received
Monitoring Officer	No comments received
Leader of the Council	No comments received

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposed Spatial Strategy consultation document 2. Protecting the Suburbs Strategy 3. Sustainability Appraisal of Proposed Spatial Strategy 4. Wider Area Growth Study – Part 1

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