

COUNCIL MEETING – 4 APRIL 2017

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5 (2)

RUSHMOOR LOCAL PLAN: DRAFT SUBMISSION CONSULTATION

A report from the meeting of Cabinet held on 4th April, 2017.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council is preparing a new Local Plan to guide the scale, type and location of future land uses in the Borough. Once adopted, it will replace the Rushmoor Core Strategy, 2011, and the “saved” policies from the Rushmoor Local Plan Review (2000). It will be an important document to help inform decisions on planning applications in the Borough.
- 1.2 The Cabinet has endorsed the Draft Submission Rushmoor Local Plan, and recommends it to Council to authorise for publication and consultation.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Work has been underway on a new Local Plan for several years. Continued changes to the planning system have meant that it has been necessary to take the time to reflect these changes in the emerging Local Plan. Hence, the Local Plan:
 - Reflects new national planning policy and guidance published since the Core Strategy was adopted;
 - Reflects the work of the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership on future economic growth; and
 - Is supported by an up-to-date evidence base, prepared on a joint basis where relevant with other local planning authorities, as required by the “Duty to Cooperate” on cross boundary strategic issues.
- 2.2 In preparing the draft Local Plan, Officers have had regard to:
 - National planning policy and guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Planning Practice Guidance;
 - “Saved” South East Plan Policy NRM6 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area;

- Other Local Plans and Strategies, including the Council Plan and the Rushmoor Sustainable Community Strategy;
- Background studies, such as an Employment Land Review, Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Water Cycle Scoping Study, and Retail and Leisure Study;
- Other planning legislation such as permitted development rights;
- Input from a cross party Local Plan Member Steering Group;
- The outcomes of previous consultations and discussions with stakeholders; and
- The findings of the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment of the Local Plan (the latter required due to the presence of protected heathlands in the Borough).

2.3 In June 2015, the Council published a “Preferred Approach” Local Plan, and this was subject to a six-week consultation period. In response to the draft Local Plan, the Council received 550 comments from 106 respondents. These responses to the consultation, along with ongoing updates to the (joint) evidence base that supports the Local Plan, have been used to inform the “Draft Submission” version of the Local Plan. This report seeks endorsement by Cabinet of this document for the next stage of consultation.

3. DETAILS OF THE PROPOSAL

3.1 As local planning authority, the Council should produce a Plan that sets out the future planning framework for its administrative area. The Rushmoor Local Plan sets out the long-term framework to guide future development in the Borough up to 2032, supported by detailed planning policies and site allocations required to deliver it. It includes a Vision of how the Borough might look in 2032 on the implementation of the policies in the Plan, and sets out a framework for how much development will take place, where it will be, and when it might be delivered. It contains policies that relate to specific parts of the Borough, including Aldershot and Farnborough town centres, North Camp District Centre, Wellesley, and Farnborough Airport. It also includes general policies on issues relating to, for example, design, heritage, housing mix, infrastructure and biodiversity.

3.2 Since the adoption of the Core Strategy, the Government has made a number of changes to the planning system. It has removed the regional planning tier, and replaced it with an obligation on local planning authorities to cooperate on strategic issues that cut across administrative boundaries. This “Duty to Cooperate” is set out in legislation, and requires tangible outcomes to be delivered through cross boundary working. These outcomes will be scrutinised at Examination by an independent Planning Inspector, and will be a significant factor in influencing the “soundness” of the new Local Plan.

- 3.3 In connection with the preparation of the Local Plan, under the Duty, the Council has worked with Hart District Council and Surrey Heath Borough Council on the preparation of joint evidence. With regard to the key issues of housing and employment, in recognition of the fact that the three authorities together form a “Housing Market Area” (HMA) and a “Functional Economic Area” (FEA), a joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and an Employment Land Review (ELR) have been prepared. The preparation of this joint evidence has been overseen by a Joint Member Steering Group, with representatives from all three local authorities.
- 3.4 The obligation set out in the National Planning Policy Framework is that local authorities should establish housing need across the HMA, and ensure that the component Local Plans together use all reasonable endeavours to meet that “objectively assessed” need within the HMA boundary. The total housing need across the HMA is 1,200 new dwellings per year over the Plan period, and of that, Rushmoor’s objectively assessed housing need is equivalent to about 436 dwellings per year, or 7,848 dwellings over the period 2014 – 2032.
- 3.5 The update to the Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) has determined that there is adequate capacity to accommodate Rushmoor’s share of the HMA’s objectively assessed housing need, with a small surplus of around 850 units over the Plan period. This is sufficient to allow some flexibility should some sites for any reason not be delivered as anticipated. However, given the tight urban nature of Rushmoor, and the fact that much of the land outside the settlement boundary is subject to nature conservation designations or is in military ownership, there is no opportunity to increase housing delivery beyond this level to assist the HMA partners with meeting any unmet need. Work is underway to secure a Memorandum of Understanding between the three authorities reflecting this position on meeting housing need.
- 3.6 In addition, the delivery of Rushmoor’s share of the HMA’s objectively assessed housing need is dependent on the identification and delivery of sufficient land to mitigate the potential recreational impact of net new dwellings on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. The Council is making every effort to identify and facilitate Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), and given the tight urban nature of the Borough, continues to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities to identify new opportunities for SANG.
- 3.7 In respect of employment land, the NPPF states that planning policies should avoid the long-term protection of sites allocated for employment use where there is no reasonable prospect of a site being used for that purpose. The updated joint Employment Land Review has provided the evidence for the Council to be clear on its strategy for protecting Strategic and Locally Important Employment Sites, whilst releasing those that are not critical to the future economic growth of the Borough or the wider FEA. This balances the role of the Borough in continuing to support the economic well-being of the Enterprise M3 Local Economic Partnership area with meeting housing needs as identified in the SHMA.

3.8 Related to economic development, and the contribution that Farnborough Airport makes to the economic well-being of the Borough (as well as the FEA and the wider economic area), the draft Local Plan contains a suite of policies to guide the future of the Airport. It sets out a “strategic” Airport policy, supported by further, detailed policies, to ensure a measured assessment of the implications of any proposals for change at the Airport over the Plan period.

3.9 In summary, the Local Plan seeks to:

- Promote development in the most accessible locations in the Borough;
- Plan for the provision of at least 7,850 new homes between 2014 and 2032;
- Ensure a buoyant economy with employment opportunities for local residents including the protection of 21 Strategic and Locally Important Employment Sites;
- Promote the regeneration of Aldershot and Farnborough Town Centres including site specific allocations to support the redevelopment of specific sites;
- Set out strategic and detailed policies to guide the future of Farnborough Airport;
- Promote measures to ensure mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
- Protect and enhance biodiversity in the Borough including protecting the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area;
- Protect local community facilities, and;
- Set out a framework to ensure good design and the protection of heritage assets.

3.10 The Draft Submission Local Plan is attached at Annex A to this report. The consequential changes to the Policies Map are attached at Annex B. The report recommendation seeks authorisation for the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Service Delivery, to make any necessary minor amendments to the Local Plan and Policies Map. These minor amendments may include further minor changes arising from the Sustainability Appraisal.

Consultation

3.11 As required by regulations, national planning policy, and national guidance that set out the process for plan preparation, engagement with stakeholders has been ongoing from commencement of preparation of the new Local Plan. In particular, as required by the “Duty to Cooperate” established in the Localism Act 2011, the Council has been working with a number of adjoining local planning authorities on key cross boundary strategic planning issues. The outcome of this has been the preparation of a joint evidence base relating to housing, employment, retail and leisure issues, and transport.

- 3.12 In addition, a consultation exercise took place on a “preferred approach” version of the Local Plan in June and July 2015. This provided a six-week period for any interested party to comment on the emerging Plan, and express views on the preferred approach to each policy, or comment on alternative options. The process and outcomes of consultation that have helped to inform the Draft Submission Local Plan are set out in supporting documents; a “Consultation Statement” and a “Duty to Cooperate Statement”, both of which will be published alongside the draft Local Plan.
- 3.13 The evolution of the Local Plan has been overseen by a cross party Member Steering Group. In addition, on occasion, Officers have held “All Members” briefing sessions, and presented the emerging Local Plan to the Council’s Environment Policy and Review Panel.
- 3.14 The Draft Submission Plan will be made available for a six-week period of public consultation. This is the final opportunity to comment on the plan, following extensive consultation at the earlier stages, as summarised above.

4. IMPLICATIONS

Legal Implications

- 4.2 The Council will find itself in a stronger position in determining planning applications to help guide the future scale and location of development in the Borough with an up-to-date Local Plan in place. Moreover, changes afoot in relation to the recently published Housing White Paper will introduce a statutory requirement for local authorities to have an up-to-date Local Plan in place, and to review that Plan at least every five years. It is therefore important to progress this Local Plan through Examination and to adoption as expediently as possible. If the Council were not to proceed with the preparation of the Local Plan, it would also be at risk of intervention from the Government, whereby the Plan making process would be taken out of the Council’s hands.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 4.3 The financial implications associated with the preparation of the new Local Plan relate primarily to the preparation of the evidence base, which is required to justify the strategy contained in the Local Plan. The bulk of the work on the evidence base is complete. In terms of forthcoming financial implications, the Local Plan should proceed to Examination during the financial year 2017 – 2018, and there will be a cost associated with this. Nevertheless, a budget has already been established for this, and it should not therefore represent an exceptional budgetary cost during the financial year.

Equalities Impact Implications

- 4.4 The Council has undertaken an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) to ascertain the equalities implications of the emerging Local Plan, which assesses the likely impact of the Plan’s policies on the local community, and

aims to eliminate discrimination and to tackle inequality. It has concluded that the policies in the Local Plan will not impact negatively upon any particular group. The EIA will be published alongside the Draft Submission Local Plan.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The preparation and adoption of a new Local Plan to guide the future scale and location of new development in the Borough is a Council Plan priority. The Draft Submission Local Plan is the culmination of several years' work, comprising evidence gathering, engagement with key stakeholders, and policy drafting. This has been with the support of the cross boundary Local Plan Member Steering Group, and the Council's Cabinet. It is imperative that the next steps are taken to move the new Local Plan towards Examination and subsequently, adoption.

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 The comments received during this consultation will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate alongside the Local Plan, for consideration by an independent Inspector as part of the Examination process. "Submission" is scheduled for October 2017, and the Examination is anticipated to take place in early 2018, dependent on Planning Inspectorate resources.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The Council is requested to approve for publication and consultation:
- (i) the Draft Submission Local Plan (Annex A); and
 - (ii) the changes to the Policies Map (Annex B);

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AND SERVICE DELIVERY