

Central Bedfordshire Council

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Thursday, 13 July 2017

The Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan

Report of: Cllr Nigel Young, Executive Member for Regeneration
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Purpose of this report

1. This report is to present the Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It provides an opportunity for the Committee to formally review its contents, seek any clarification required and provide comments. The views of the committee will be formally recorded as its response to the public consultation. This is the first draft which has been prepared using a range of new background evidence work. Feedback from this Committee together with all of the other consultation comments will be used to prepare the final consultation draft of the Plan (the pre-submission version).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to:

1. Formally consider and comment on the consultation draft of the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan that was endorsed by Executive for consultation purposes on 20th June 2017.

Executive

2. Executive approved the Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan for consultation on 20th June 2017. The consultation runs for eight weeks from 4th July – 29th August 2017. The purpose of this report as outlined above is therefore to formally seek the views of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee during this consultation period.

Draft Local Plan Overview

3. The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan is the key strategic planning document for Central Bedfordshire and will guide and support the delivery

of new infrastructure, homes and jobs. It sets out the long-term vision and objectives for the area, what is going to happen, where, and how this will be achieved and delivered up until 2035. The detailed policies within it will also be used to determine planning applications. This consultation version of the Plan sets out a number of potential strategic growth location options, which constitute a sustainable strategy informed by consultation and technical evidence gathered to date.

4. A 'quick read' overview of the Draft Local Plan is appended to this report (Appendix B) in addition to a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' (Appendix C) which are intended to assist with clarifying the technical process for residents and stakeholders.
5. The lifespan of the document is 20 years, but it is anticipated that once adopted, it will have to be reviewed earlier in order to be able to respond to a number of emerging strategies; notably the Cambridge–Oxford growth corridor as identified by the National Infrastructure Commission . This is entirely consistent with national planning policy and emerging Government policy approaches as set out in the Housing White Paper (February 2017).
6. This document is not the final plan, but represents the Council's initial approach to planning for growth based on the Shaping Central Bedfordshire consultation, Community Planning input and the new and updated evidence base. At this stage of the plan's preparation, the consultation will be seeking views on the growth location options and policies in the document as there are no specific sites identified. The responses, including that of this Committee; together with ongoing evidence work will shape the final version of the Plan which will allocate a range of small, medium and strategic scale sites to deliver sustainable growth.
7. This Local Plan once adopted, replaces the North Core Strategy and Development Management Policies Document (2009) and the majority of the remaining policies within the South Bedfordshire Local Plan (2004), the Mid Bedfordshire Local Plan (2005) and the remaining saved policies of the Bedfordshire and Luton Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2005) so far as they affect Central Bedfordshire. Those residual site allocations in the north Site Allocations Document (2011) that are not already built out will remain in addition to the Minerals and Waste Local Plan – Strategic Sites and Policies (2014) which will sit alongside this new Local Plan once adopted forming the Development Plan for Central Bedfordshire.

Scale of Growth

8. The Plan is required to meet the Council's objectively assessed need (OAN) for housing for the Plan period together with any agreed unmet need from neighbouring authorities, identified through Duty to Co-operate discussions. At this stage the numbers need to be flexible and therefore

the draft Plan identifies a range of between 20-30,000 new additional homes for this Plan and 24 – 30,000 new jobs.

9. There are a number of reasons why these need to be flexible in this version of the Plan. Firstly the Government intend to consult on a new methodology for calculating OAN and this will affect the number of homes needed in Central Bedfordshire. Secondly, Central Bedfordshire is one of the most connected locations in England and sits within the Cambridge - Oxford corridor; as such it has been highlighted by Government as an area with high growth potential subject to the necessary infrastructure being delivered. There is however still some uncertainty about the route of East-West Rail, the Oxford –Cambridge Expressway and potential upgrades to the A1 through Central Bedfordshire. The realisation of these significant transport projects will be required to deliver the higher level of growth.

Developing the Strategy

10. The Council undertook a non-statutory consultation in September 2016 known as 'Shaping Central Bedfordshire' to inform the development of the spatial strategy. The authority was divided into four areas which reflect the character of our towns, villages and countryside, existing and planned transport corridors, and the Green Belt designation. This was to help us to assess in broad terms growth potential for economic opportunities, the development of homes, and the scope to invest in local services and amenities. The results of this initial high level consultation showed a degree of support within each area for the opportunities and constraints identified as well as the suggested scales of growth.
11. The evidence base for the Plan is extensive and has been largely updated to ensure that the strategy is robust and will stand up to scrutiny. It will be published alongside the Plan when it goes out to consultation. Some evidence gathering on areas such as infrastructure and viability will be ongoing to ensure that the final Plan is deliverable and an appropriate strategy for the area.

Spatial Strategy

12. The spatial strategy is a set of key principles that guides the Council's approach to distribution and types of growth. The strategy is set out below.

The Plan seeks to:

- Build on our existing and emerging economic strengths in key sectors and deliver a minimum of 24,000-30,000 new jobs.
- Deliver between 20,000 and 30,000 homes through new villages, moderate extensions to existing towns and villages and a new market town in line with the provision of new infrastructure and to meet identified housing need close to key transport corridors (East-west, A1/East Coast Mainline and M1/Thameslink)

- Balance the delivery of significant sustainable infrastructure and growth with the enhancement and protection of existing communities, landscape, heritage and countryside and actively prevent the coalescence of settlements across the area. This will include investigating options for the creation of new Green Belt where appropriate.
- Maximise opportunities for the intensification and redevelopment of land e.g. at Tempsford Airfield and RAF Henlow and the regeneration of urban areas (Biggleswade, Dunstable, Houghton Regis, Flitwick, Leighton Linlade & Sandy) through town centre frameworks or masterplans.
- Identify and deliver spatial options and strategic opportunities that could provide for longer term economic and housing growth at Tempsford, Biggleswade and in the Marston Vale. This growth will support and must be supported by new strategic infrastructure particularly the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway, A1 improvements and new rail stations/transport interchanges along the East West Rail route at Ridgmont, Wixams and north of Sandy.
- Deliver housing need identified for the Luton HMA and some unmet need from Luton close to where it arises but crucially, where there is capacity to do so sustainably. This will be either through strategic extensions close to Luton’s urban edge or through moderate extensions to existing villages and towns with good connectivity and access to services. This will mean releasing some Green Belt land where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated.

13. Subject to further assessment relating to numbers, sustainability and deliverability, new development will be planned for at a selection of the following locations which are categorised by their configuration/type. In addition to these proposed growth locations, development will also be brought forward through Neighbourhood Plans, and through medium and small scale sites outside of Green Belt. These will be set out in the pre-submission version of the Plan. The indicative infrastructure requirements for all proposed strategic growth location options are set out in section 8.5 of the Local Plan (Appendix A).

Mixed Use Housing Led Growth Location Options

14. New Market Town

- Nr. Tempsford (around 7000 homes)

New Villages

- East of Biggleswade (3000 homes)
- Marston Vale (around 5000 homes)
- Aspley Guise (North of Railway Line) (around 3000 homes)

Town Extensions

- North of Luton (around 4000 homes)
- West of Luton (around 2000 homes)

- Wixams Southern Extension (around 500 homes)
- East of Arlesey (around 2000 homes)

Village Extensions

- Inset Green Belt Villages (around 2000 homes collectively)
- Small and medium sites outside of Green Belt (capacity to be determined in the pre-submission version of the Plan)

Employment

15. The Plan seeks to deliver 24,000 new jobs through existing employment sites and also through the housing led mixed use growth locations set out above in order to meet local needs. In addition another 6000+ jobs will be planned for at the following strategic locations to meet strategic demand in the key transport corridors for warehousing and logistics.

- A1 Corridor – Biggleswade South - Strategic Employment Area
- M1 Junction 13 – Strategic Employment Area
- M1 Junction 11a – Strategic Employment Area
- RAF Henlow – opportunity for mixed use employment supporting the wider visitor economy and research and development sector

Site Assessment

16. The sites which were put forward through the “call for sites” in 2014 and 2016 have been assessed against technical site assessment criteria, a draft of which was consulted on in July 2016. This has identified a pool of around 200 out of the 850 sites which are worthy of further consideration through the plan making process. Once the Council has completed the further work on these sites, a full Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment will be produced. This will be published alongside the pre-submission version of the Plan in 2018.

17. At this stage of the Local Plan process, no formal allocations have been proposed. This document therefore provides a preliminary summary of the technical site assessment process. The allocation of sites will be supported by the whole evidence base for the Local Plan and the distribution of growth will be directed by the spatial approach set out in paragraph 12.

Council Priorities

18. The Central Bedfordshire Local Plan, as an overarching planning policy document, has the potential to contribute to each of the Council priorities. The main focus of the document is “Enhancing Central Bedfordshire” through planning for the new homes, jobs and infrastructure the area needs while protecting the countryside. However, the strategy can also help contribute to creating stronger communities, improved educational attainment and promoting health and wellbeing, through the delivery of

'walkable' neighbourhoods, new open space and leisure facilities funded by developer contributions.

Corporate Implications

Legal Implications

19. Once adopted the Local Plan will form part of the statutory Development Plan and will be used to determine planning applications. Until this happens the existing adopted plans will continue to set the planning framework. The Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
20. This consultation stage forms part of Regulation 18 (preparing a local plan) of these regulations and is an important formative stage in ensuring that the final Plan is sound and robust and will meet the requirements of the regulations when it reaches the Public Examination.

Financial and Risk Implications

21. Other than staff costs already built in to the base budget, the main financial cost associated with producing this draft Local Plan are specialist consultant's costs in preparing technical studies. Costs are being met from within the Development Plan budget already approved by Council. Funding will be drawn down as required from the budget and Local Plan reserve. Approximately £180K was spent from the budget in 15/16 and £280K in 16/17 with £73.5K recouped via contributions from other Local Authorities in relation to joint work on the evidence base.
22. The scale of the Council's investment should be seen in the context of the scale of new investment (new commercial and retail development as well as residential) into Central Bedfordshire that a Local Plan will enable. The cost of plan-making should also be seen against the cost of the alternative approach of fighting costly appeals against speculative development.
23. Failing to adopt a "sound" Plan could lead to a failure to deliver the required levels of housing, jobs and infrastructure proposed for growth and regeneration in the area in a planned way. This is the first draft of the Plan but it still has taken into consideration the soundness tests set out in the NPPF. These tests need to be complied with otherwise there is a risk that a planning inspector could find the Plan unsound. To help minimise this risk, the evidence base has been refreshed and specialist external advice sought on the robustness of the process.
24. An internal officer Project Board which reviews risks and mitigation on a regular basis through a risk register has also been in operation throughout the lifespan of the Local Plan programme.

Sustainability

25. The Draft Plan is subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which promotes sustainable development through assessing the extent to which the emerging Plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve environmental, economic and social objectives. For the SA of the Draft Plan, health and equality considerations have been integrated to ensure that these issues are also well represented in the assessment. The SA makes a varied appraisal, identifying mostly positive and neutral effects with some negative effects of the emerging approach.
26. The Draft Plan is subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which promotes sustainable development through assessing the extent to which the emerging Plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve environmental, economic and social objectives. For the SA of the Draft Plan, health and equality considerations have been integrated to ensure that these issues are also well represented in the assessment. The SA makes a varied appraisal, identifying mostly positive and neutral effects with some negative effects of the emerging approach.

Equalities Implications

27. The Draft Plan is subject to a specific Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment (EqIA). At this stage the initial screening demonstrates that the draft Local Plan covers a broad range of issues and does not discriminate against protected groups. The overall Plan was mostly positive in terms of helping to advance equality of opportunity. This EqIA will need to be revised and updated as the Plan progresses but as no negative effects have been identified at this stage a full EqIA will not be required.

Conclusion and next Steps

28. The Draft Plan is the culmination of 16 months of extensive technical evidence gathering and analysis, underpinned by high level consultation and community planning work. This consultation document is a robust strategy which meets legislative and policy requirements.
29. Consultation began on 4th July for a period of 8 weeks after which the results including the formal response from this Committee; will be analysed and used to inform the final pre-submission draft Plan.
30. In addition to the Local Plan the full supporting technical evidence base where not already published on the website, has been released for consultation on 4th July. This is comprised of the following documents.

- Sustainability Appraisal (Stage 1)
- Site Assessment Technical Document
- Transport Modelling (Stage 1)
- Growth Options Studies
- Employment Land Review
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Settlement Capacity Study (Stage 1)
- Retail Study
- Viability Study (Stage 1)
- Green Belt Review (Stage 1)
- Green Belt Review (Stage 2)
- East West Rail Development Gain Study
- Urban Capacity Study
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Water Cycle Strategy (Stage 1)

31. In February 2018, the final consultation draft of the Local Plan will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee to seek endorsement of the approach set out; prior to taking it to Executive for approval to publish the Plan for formal public consultation.
32. This further public consultation scheduled for March 2018 (regulation 19) precedes the submission of the Draft Plan to the Secretary of State. Following that, the Plan will then be examined by an independent inspector.

Appendices

Appendix A: The Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan

Appendix B: Quick Read Summary of the Draft Central Bedfordshire Local Plan

Appendix C: 'Frequently Asked Questions' for the Draft Local Plan

Background Papers

None

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