

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

22 November 2016

West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: Consultation on Issues and Options

For Recommendation

Portfolio Holder

Cllr I Gardner, Planning

Senior Leadership Team Contact:

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Report Author:

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Statutory Authority

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 provide the statutory basis for the preparation and review of local plans.

The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 provide the statutory basis for undertaking the sustainability appraisal of plans.

Purpose of Report

- 1 To seek the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: Issues and Options document prior to it being agreed, for the purposes of public consultation, by the Executive Committee and Council.

Officer Recommendations

- 2 That this Committee recommends to the Executive Committee and Council that the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: Issues and Options document, set out in Appendix 1, be agreed for the purposes of public consultation.

Reason for Decision

- 3 To enable the West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: Issues and Options document to be approved for the purposes of public consultation, in order to make progress on the review of the Local Plan.

Background and Reason Decision Needed

- 4 The inspector for the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan produced his report on 14 August 2015. The report concluded *“that the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Joint Local Plan provides an appropriate basis for the planning of the District and Borough Councils providing a number of modifications are made to the Plan.”*
- 5 In his report, the inspector stated *“it is imperative that an early review is undertaken to identify additional land capable of meeting housing needs to the end of the current plan period (2031) as well as the broad location for development in the five year period thereafter”* (i.e. to 2036). The council adopted the local plan on 22 October 2015, including a modification in paragraph 1.5.1 to reflect the inspector’s conclusion. It states that *“it is likely that a review of the plan will be in place by 2021”*.
- 6 On 09 February 2016, the Executive agreed to begin the local plan review process, with stakeholder consultation on a sustainability appraisal scoping report. At that meeting the Executive also approved the 2016 Local Development Scheme (LDS), which included a timetable for the production of the local plan review.
- 7 Since then officers have been working on the preparation of a document to be the subject of public consultation, which would set out the key issues and main options for the local plan review (see Appendix 1). Sustainability appraisal work has taken place alongside the work on the issues and options consultation document and an accompanying sustainability appraisal report has also been produced (see background documents).
- 8 The documents will go forward for consideration by the Executive Committee and Council to seek approval for the purposes of public consultation. Similar reports will also be taken through the committee cycles of Weymouth and Portland Borough Council. At this stage the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are being sought so that they can be taken into account by the Executive Committee and Council prior to the Issues and Options document being agreed for the purposes of public consultation.

Implications

- 9 The issues and options document discusses the future level of growth needed (both in terms of housing and employment land) to 2036. It mainly focuses on identifying potential site options for meeting the identified need for additional growth, but also seeks views on a number of different policy areas.
- 10 The current local plan identifies a need for 775 additional new homes to be provided each year over the 20-year plan period from 2011 to 2031. This equates to a total need for 15,500 new homes, although the current local plan only makes provision for 14,855 dwellings (i.e. there is a shortfall of 645 units).

- 11 Extending the plan period to 2036 (as recommended by the local plan inspector) would require provision to be made for a further 3,875 new homes. When the shortfall in provision to 2031 is added to this figure, it gives an overall requirement for the local plan review to make provision for at least 4,520 new homes in addition to those already provided for in the current local plan.
- 12 Views will be sought on whether the figure of 775 additional new homes per annum remains an appropriate figure for the 'full objectively assessed need' for housing in the local plan area. Views will also be sought on whether the level of additional housing provision to 2036 should be at least 4,250 additional new homes.
- 13 Policy SUS2 of the current local plan establishes a 'settlement hierarchy' and seeks to distribute a greater proportion of development at the larger and more sustainable settlements. The 'main towns' of Dorchester and Weymouth are identified as the 'highest priority locations' for new development. Elsewhere in the plan area, the focus for future development is the 'market and coastal towns' of Beaminster, Bridport, Lyme Regis, Portland, Sherborne and the village of Crossways. In rural areas, the policy seeks to direct development to settlements with defined development boundaries (DDBs), which are generally the larger villages.
- 14 For each of the 'main towns' and 'market and coastal towns' and Crossways, the issues and options document identifies 'broad areas of search' around the periphery of each settlement. This initial 360 degree search has then been refined, on the basis of sustainability appraisal work, to identify a number of potential options for growth in these different locations. Views are also sought on potential options for the expansion of Yeovil into parts of West Dorset in the issues and options document.
- 15 The issues and options document sets out the indicative capacity for each of these more refined options and highlights key development issues with taking these sites forward. Views are sought on:
 - what would be appropriate levels of growth for each settlement;
 - issues associated with the development of the identified site options; and
 - the infrastructure that would be required to take the sites forward, either individually or in combination.
- 16 The issues and options document makes it clear that there is no commitment by the councils to the development of any of these sites at this stage: the purpose of the consultation being to begin a dialogue with local communities on how best to meet future development needs. The responses to the consultation will then be fed into the next stage of preparation of the review, which will be to identify 'preferred options' for meeting the need for growth.
- 17 The current local plan was prepared with extensive engagement with members, key stakeholders and the public. It has also been found sound by a planning inspector and adopted by both councils very recently (in October 2015). On that basis, it is only intended to review the policies in the local plan where issues have arisen.

- 18 With additional housing growth being proposed in the review, it will be important to look again at the need for employment land, shops and other town centre uses to provide jobs and the need for infrastructure to support housing and economic development. The issues and options document seeks views on these matters.
- 19 The housing policies in the current local plan will need to be reviewed to reflect recent (and anticipated future) changes to Government policy. The Government is seeking to diversify the housing market by encouraging custom and self-build and the issues and options document seeks views on how best to do that. Whilst there remains a lack of clarity on what local authorities will need to do to promote starter homes, views are sought on what the focus should be for other forms of affordable housing provision which may also be sought (i.e. rental or shared equity) alongside starter homes.
- 20 The local plan inspector indicated that the councils should look again at their approach to green infrastructure and coastal change management and there is a commitment to do so in the adopted local plan. These are matters on which views are sought in the issues and options document. Views are also sought on the issues of design and wind energy.
- 21 Following consideration by Overview and Scrutiny, the issues and options document will then be considered by Executive in December 2016 and Full Council in January 2017. Once agreed the issues and options document will be subject to a six week public consultation period in February and March 2017.
- 22 Consultation will include:
- Publishing the issues and options document;
 - Providing more detail in accompanying sustainability appraisal and background papers;
 - Writing to all people on the consultation database;
 - Public exhibitions in the main towns;
 - Ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, including town and parish councils; and
 - Making all material available on the website.
- 23 The responses to the consultation will feed into the next stage (preferred options), which will be subject to a further round of public consultation later in 2017. The local plan review document would then be prepared (and subject to a further round of public consultation) before being submitted to the Secretary of State for examination.
- 24 The rounds of 'issues and options' and 'preferred options' consultation will enable a dialogue to take place with the residents and key stakeholders in the local area. Hopefully this approach will:
- engage the local community in the plan review process;
 - encourage discussion of the key issues and main options; and
 - help to ensure that the most appropriate overall strategy is developed for the local area, prior to the local plan review being submitted for examination.

Corporate Plan

- 25 The review of the local plan will contribute to achieving the corporate aims relating to economy and quality of life, including: helping to stimulate economic growth so that the district offers better jobs and prospects for local people; increasing the number of new homes built within the district; enhancing the quality of life of people living and working in the district; and safeguarding and providing opportunities to enjoy the natural and built environment now and in the future.

Financial

- 28 The preparation of the local plan review will be undertaken from within existing budgets. Additional sums have been included in the budget for 2016/17 primarily to fund updates to the evidence base and to facilitate community engagement on key issues such as the consideration of options for growth.

Equalities

- 29 When draft policies are produced for the local plan review, they will be subject to an equalities impact assessment.

Environmental

- 30 The issues and options document for the local plan review has been subject to sustainability appraisal, which has considered the economic, social and environmental implications of the issues and options identified. The sustainability appraisal document is listed as a background document. Work on the sustainability appraisal will be updated in tandem with work on the subsequent stages of preparing the local plan review.
- 31 The local plan review will also require a habitats regulations assessment, which will consider the potential impact of proposals on internationally important wildlife sites.
- 32 Evidence to support development site options and new or revised policies will be updated to ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account. For example, new / updated studies will be produced to assess the impact of proposed development on the landscape and the historic environment.

Economic Development

- 33 Part of the economic vision for the area set out in the current local plan is to facilitate inward investment to create better jobs. It is proposed that this vision will be carried forward into the local plan review. The need for employment land will also be reassessed and further employment land will be identified if required. This is likely to lead to a growth in local employment and the number of businesses in the area.

Risk Management (including Health & Safety)

- 34 The local plan inspector recommended an ‘early review’ of the current local plan, in view of the overall shortfall in housing provision to 2031. It is important that the councils continue to take forward the review in a timely manner to ensure that it is in place by 2021, as suggested by the Inspector.
- 35 By taking forward the local plan review in a timely manner, developers will be encouraged to work with the councils through the plan-making process, reducing the risk of speculative planning applications being submitted on larger sites. This approach will also ensure that a long term supply of housing sites is secured and that there is sufficient time to engage with local communities in reviewing policies and considering alternative options, whilst still managing to have the review in place by the 2021 deadline set by the inspector.

Human Resources

- 36 Work on the local plan review and the sustainability appraisal will be undertaken primarily by the spatial policy and implementation team. Advice will also be taken from economic regeneration, legal and other officers as work on the review progresses. Consultants may also be employed to produce updated evidence base studies. They will be funded from within existing budgets.

Consultation and Engagement

- 37 The local plan review will be subject to public consultation at a number of different stages. All consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Councils’ Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

Appendices

Appendix 1 – West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: Issues and Options Document

Background Papers

Report on the examination into the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Joint Local Plan – The Planning Inspectorate (August 2015) – link - <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/421782/West-Dorset-Weymouth--Portland-Adopted-Local-Plan-Inspectors-Report>

West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan 2015 – West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council (October 2015) – link - <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/421631/West-Dorset-Weymouth--Portland-Adopted-Local-Plan>

Programme for the Local Plan Review and Related Policy Documents: The Local Development Scheme for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland - West Dorset

District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council (March 2016) - <https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/423273/Local-Development-Scheme>

West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review: Sustainability Appraisal of the Issues and Options Document - West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council (to be published February 2017)

Footnote

38 Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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