

# Cabinet

## 8 December 2020

### Dorset Council Local Plan: Consultation

#### For Decision

<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr D Walsh, Planning
<b>Local Councillor(s):</b>	All
<b>Executive Director:</b>	J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place
<b>Report Author:</b>	Hilary Jordan
<b>Title:</b>	Service Manager for Spatial Planning
<b>Tel:</b>	01305 252303
<b>Email:</b>	hilary.jordan@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

**Report Status:** Public

#### Recommendations:

1. That the Dorset Council Local Plan Options Consultation document, included as Appendix A to this report, be approved for the purpose of public consultation, to take place for eight weeks from mid-January 2021.
2. That the Service Manager for Spatial Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, be authorised to make any minor changes necessary prior to publication.
3. That changes to the Statement of Community Involvement included as Appendix B are agreed to reflect the practicalities of consulting during the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### Reason for Recommendation:

Having an up to date local plan in place is critical in order to shape the future of the Dorset Council area, provide for development to meet the area's needs, and manage decisions on planning applications. Cabinet have previously agreed the programme for preparing a Dorset Council Local Plan that would on adoption replace the current district local plans. Public consultation is a vital part of the process, and this consultation will enable a wide range of views to be taken into account in moving the plan forwards.

An amendment to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is needed to clarify the approach that the Council will take in consulting on the local plan and on individual planning applications during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that a new Dorset Council Local Plan is being prepared, to replace the current adopted district local plans. This intention was agreed by Cabinet in June 2019 and we are now approaching the significant stage of a major public consultation across Dorset.
- 1.2 The documents attached at Appendix A form the complete consultation document, setting out proposals for the policy framework of the new plan as well as a full range of potential development sites in order to meet the needs for housing, employment and other uses over the period from 2021 to 2038. The sites included as options for housing development are sufficient to meet the housing requirements of Dorset Council, as identified under the current national standard methodology, and the revised version of the methodology that was published for consultation in August.
- 1.3 It is proposed that public consultation takes place for eight weeks, starting in mid-January 2021. The ongoing coronavirus pandemic means that face to face consultation events are unlikely to be possible, but in addition to the document and supporting evidence being available online, a range of consultation methods are proposed including online events, social media, and copies available for loan in libraries.
- 1.4 This is a critical stage of consultation as it is still early in the process and the council will be free to make as many changes as are necessary following the assessment of the consultation responses and any further evidence. The next stage will be the preparation of a final draft plan that will be published, with an opportunity for further feedback and comments, before being submitted for examination. At that stage, responses will all be considered and assessed by the independent inspector who examines the plan.
- 1.5 The proposed timetable, agreed by Cabinet in September in the revised 'Local Development Scheme', is that the publication draft plan would be ready in autumn 2021 and submitted for examination in March 2022. The intention is to adopt the plan by April 2023.

- 1.6 The proposed changes to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) are intended to clarify the approach to consultation during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **2. Financial Implications**

The plan is being prepared using budgets previously reserved by the individual district councils for the preparation of their local plan reviews.

Development in the area brings in funding including council tax, business rates, community infrastructure levy and section 106 agreements, in order to contribute towards the cost of the infrastructure and services needed to support it.

## **3. Wellbeing and Health Implications**

The policies and proposals in the plan seek to provide for housing, employment, community facilities and open space to meet the area's future needs. All of these are important for individuals' and communities' wellbeing. The provision of open space and green infrastructure in association with development, and planning development so as to encourage walking and cycling, can help to enable healthier environments and support people's health and wellbeing.

## **4. Climate Implications**

Sustainable development is the overarching aim of the national planning system. The local plan sets out policies and proposals for developing in such a way as to minimise impacts on the climate, including developing in locations that are accessible by modes of transport other than private cars, so as to reduce the need to travel, and encouraging energy efficiency in developments. The local plan has also identified some potential wind turbine locations and is seeking to test public support for these.

## **5. Other Implications**

The plan proposes a sustainable pattern of future development, with development concentrated in locations that are accessible to jobs and facilities. Planning for future development provides opportunities for new services and facilities to be provided to meet the aims of a range of the council's work and that of partner organisations. The design and layout of development can influence people's health and levels of physical activity, and this is taken into account in the emerging policies.

## **6. Risk Assessment**

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: MEDIUM

Residual Risk: MEDIUM

## **7. Equalities Impact Assessment**

An Equalities Impact Assessment is currently being prepared.

## **8. Appendices**

Appendix A: Draft of Dorset Council Local Plan, Options Consultation document

Appendix B: Amended Statement of Community Involvement

## **9. Background Papers**

A range of technical studies have been carried out to inform the plan, and are available online at <https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/planning-buildings-land/planning-policy/dorset-council-local-plan.aspx>. These include the work undertaken on the previous district local plan reviews, which are being taken into account in developing the new plan.

The current Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), adopted in January 2020 is available online at the above link.

## **9. Background**

9.1 Cabinet agreed in June 2019 to start work on a single Dorset Council Local Plan, which would replace the current adopted local plans, rather than complete the district local plan reviews that were in preparation at the time. The council's first Local Development Scheme (the programme for local plan preparation) was agreed at that meeting and has been revised since, in September this year.

9.2 Having an up to date local plan is critical for any local planning authority. It enables us to plan for future development to meet people's housing, employment and infrastructure needs, in the most sustainable locations. It gives us a framework for protecting the area's many environmental assets from any adverse effects of development. And it gives landowners,

developers and communities a greater degree of certainty about where development is likely to be allowed. The local plan, together with neighbourhood plans prepared by local communities, is the first reference when making decisions on planning applications: decisions must be made in accordance with the statutory development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 9.3 It is particularly important that local plans are reviewed regularly, and that they provide sufficient land to meet housing requirements. Where local plan policies are more than five years old, or when the council cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of land for housing, the policies are regarded as out of date and cannot be given as much weight in decisions on applications. Much of the Dorset Council area does not have a five-year housing land supply at the moment, and the preparation of a new local plan is the opportunity to provide a more robust housing supply and make sure that we have greater control over planning decisions in Dorset. This can only be achieved, however, if we allocate sufficient land, in areas where there is market demand for housing and where development is viable, to make sure that we meet the housing requirements expected of us.
- 9.4 Members will be aware that the Government has been consulting recently on potential changes to the national planning system. There have been two consultations, one on changes to the current planning system (including the details of the standard methodology for calculating housing requirements) and the other proposing radical changes to the whole system, in the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper. The potential changes to the current system have been taken into account in the options consultation document, which includes enough options for housing development sites to meet the revised requirement for Dorset.
- 9.5 If the proposals set out in the White Paper are implemented in their current form, then a very different type of local plan document will need to be prepared: much more digitally based; without general 'development management policies'; identifying all land in the area under three categories for protection, renewal or growth; and meeting a binding national target for housebuilding. We do not however know at this stage what the final changes will be and when they will come into effect. In the meantime, it is still very important to progress this local plan, so as to minimise the risk of a longer period without an up to date plan.

## **10. The Options Consultation document**

- 10.1 The options consultation document, included as an Appendix to this report, sets out as fully as possible the policies and proposals being considered for inclusion in the local plan, and includes questions to encourage people to respond. It has been prepared taking account of the work previously carried out on the district local plan reviews; the consultation responses made on those reviews; discussion with internal and external stakeholders and service providers; and a range of studies commissioned to inform it. A cross-party informal Executive Advisory Panel of members has met regularly throughout the preparation work so far, to advise and steer progress.
- 10.2 The document is structured as the final plan is intended to be, with an introduction and series of chapters covering both development management policies and proposals for development. The chapters are as follows:
- Introduction
  - Development Strategy
  - Environment
  - Housing
  - Economy
  - Community Infrastructure
  - South-Eastern Dorset area
  - Central Dorset area
  - Northern Dorset area
  - Western Dorset area
- 10.3 The plan period is proposed to be from 2021 to 2038, reflecting the fact that local plans are meant to cover a period of fifteen years from their adoption, though the plan would be reviewed within that time. The consultation document identifies land for a minimum of 30,481 new homes (1,793 per annum) to be provided over that 17-year period. This is in accordance with the current standard methodology for calculating housing requirements, but sufficient land is identified also to meet the requirement that would result from the revisions to the standard methodology that were published for consultation this summer. This also allows some 'headroom', giving the flexibility needed to respond to fluctuations in the housing market and maintain the required five-year housing land supply.
- 10.4 The consultation document also identifies a minimum of 131 hectares of employment land to be provided over the plan period.

10.5 A full sustainability appraisal is being carried out alongside the preparation of the consultation document. This will be available online by the start of the consultation period.

## **11. Consultation**

11.1 It is proposed that consultation takes place for eight weeks, starting in January 2021 (11 January is currently the target date for it to begin). We will write directly to statutory consultees and stakeholders, including parish and town councils, and all those individuals and groups who have asked to be kept informed of local plan progress, to inform them. We will also make sure that the consultation is well publicised, and will use online events, social media and other means to ensure that people are aware and can comment, though the normal face to face consultation events are unlikely to be achievable during the coronavirus pandemic.

11.2 All the comments and feedback received will be carefully considered by officers with the key messages being shared with members. The responses will be taken into account in the preparation of a full draft plan, which will then come to Cabinet and full Council in the autumn of 2021 to agree publication and submission for examination.

11.3 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out the council will undertake consultation for planning purposes. It covers both planning policy consultations and consultation on individual planning applications. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some minor changes are proposed to clarify how consultation will take place in order to minimise the risk of transmitting the virus amongst the community. These changes are shown as ~~strikethrough~~ for text proposed for deletion or **bold and underlined** for text proposed for insertion within Appendix B.

### **Footnote:**

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