

Cabinet

3 October 2023

Consultation on national plan-making reforms

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr D Walsh, Planning

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary:

The Government are currently consulting on changes to how local plans are prepared. The production of a local plan is important for the Council as it guides how the area will evolve reflecting the Council's aims and priorities for Dorset. Responding to the Government consultation on changes to the local plan making process is important for the Council and it is therefore recommended that a response to the consultation be sent, by the deadline of 18 October 2023.

Recommendation:

That the full response to the consultation questions, as set out in the Appendix to this report, be sent to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The response welcomes the proposed amendments that simplify the plan making process but expresses concern over the tight timetable for the preparation of a new style local plan.

Reason for Recommendation:

To enable the Council to influence the changes to the local plan making process being proposed by Government.

1. **Report**

- 1.1 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill proposes a number of changes to the planning system and is currently passing through parliament. There is uncertainty over when this Bill will receive Royal Assent however the expectation is that the changes to the planning system will be put in place by late 2024.
- 1.2 This consultation sets out a number of proposals related to the amendments to the planning system including a new framework for the preparation of local plans and some associated changes. Further regulations will be required once the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill receives Royal Assent and this consultation seeks input into the process so that regulations, national policy and guidance can be prepared.
- 1.3 This current consultation follows on from the previous consultation on the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy which took place earlier this year. A response to this consultation was agreed by Cabinet on 28 February 2023 and submitted to DLUHC.
- 1.4 The consultation focuses on changes to the approach for preparing local plans (including Minerals and Waste local plans) with the aim of implementing a more streamlined and focus approach.
- 1.5 Local plans should be shorter and more digital in their presentation to enable more people to engage more easily. They should be focused on telling the story of how the area should develop over time setting out the type, location and timetable for development.
- 1.6 The proposals suggest that Local Plans should:
 - Ensure that sustainability is a golden thread running through the plan, directing development to suitable locations
 - Establish a locally distinctive vision
 - Set out the amount, type, location and timescale for development – meeting key economic, social and environmental objectives
 - Include a key diagram – a representation of the plan’s spatial strategy
 - Only include policies to reflect local characteristics
 - Include a digital policies map which should be kept up to date

- Include monitoring and review arrangements

1.7 The proposed approach would look to use templates to establish standard approaches to parts of the local plan with the intention of simplifying and speeding up the plan making process. The changes would expect local plans to be prepared over a 30 month period with the key stages being as follows:

Scoping and early participation (4 months): Preparation of a Project Initiation Document setting out the expected evidence requirements, the approach to engagement, a plan production timetable and monitoring arrangements.

Gateway 1 assessment (formal start of 30 month plan preparation process)

Plan visioning and strategy development: First round of public consultation (8 weeks). Undertake visioning about the future of the area, confirming evidence requirements, testing options and local priorities.

Gateway 2 Assessment

Evidence gathering and drafting the plan: Production of proportionate evidence to demonstrate soundness of the plan and continued engagement with councillors during the drafting of the plan.

Engagement, proposing changes, submission: Second round of public consultation (6 weeks). Amendments to the plan to respond to the consultation

Gateway 3 Assessment (prior to submission for examination)

Examination (6 months): examination in public

Finalisation and adoption of digital plan (1 month): Adoption of the plan if found sound at examination, plan monitoring to feed back into its review.

1.8 Four months before the Plan visioning and strategy development stage, a local authority must notify stakeholders of its intent to prepare a local plan. There is also an expectation that Local Plans are reviewed and adopted every five years meaning that once a plan is adopted, a review must commence within two and a half years.

1.9 At three points during the preparation of the local plan, a Gateway Assessment will be required. The intention is that this Assessment, carried

out by a suitably qualified person (a Planning Inspector by default) would be an opportunity for the local authority to receive feedback on their emerging local plan. The purpose of the gateway assessments would be to ensure the plan sets off in the right direction, ensure compliance with legal and procedural requirements and to monitor and track progress against the local plan timetable.

- 1.10 The proposed approach seeks to front load engagement in local plan preparation with early engagement to establish the scope of the local plan, engagement part way through the process to give feedback on the options being considered and a final opportunity for comment prior to submission for examination.
- 1.11 The changes to the plan making system also propose new Supplementary Plans. The suggestion is that these will be subject to a light touch examination process similar to that currently in place for Neighbourhood Plans. It is intended that these Supplementary plans will be used in exceptional cases where there is a need to respond to a change in circumstances in the period between the review of a local plan.
- 1.12 It is proposed that a small cohort of front runners would be selected to work through the new plan making process. This was expected to commence in Autumn 2024 once the necessary regulations, national policy and guidance are prepared.
- 1.13 A further proposal is for pilot authorities to run community land auctions. These would involve landowners being invited to put forward the price at which they would be willing to release their land for development. This would then be considered as part of the plan making process with the uplift in land value being captured by the local authority to provide the necessary supporting infrastructure.

2. **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications of commenting on the consultation. Costs of local plan preparation are being met from existing budgets and from reserves.

3. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

One of the roles of the planning system is to contribute towards the delivery of sustainable development. Protecting environmental assets and addressing climate change is one of the key parts of this.

4. **Well-being and Health Implications**

Well-being and health implications of development will be taken into account through local plans and the amended approach will include health and well-being considerations.

5. **Other Implications**

There are implications for the preparation of the Dorset Council Local Plan, as set out in the report.

6. **Risk Assessment**

6.1 **HAVING CONSIDERED:** the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

There are no implications of responding to the consultation. The consultation includes a question inviting any comments about impacts of the proposed changes on protected groups.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Proposed response to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Implementation of plan-making reforms consultation.

9. **Background Papers**

The consultation paper is available online at [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: consultation on implementation of plan-making reforms - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/levelling-up-and-regeneration-bill-consultation-on-implementation-of-plan-making-reforms)