



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 12 JULY 2023
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2041
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Carl Rylett Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: carl.rylett@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Charlie Jackson, Assistant Director Planning and Sustainability Email: charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk
Report author	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider a focused consultation paper which is intended to help inform the preparation of the new Local Plan 2041.
Annexes	Annex A – Local Plan 2041: Focused Consultation Paper (July 2023)
Recommendation(s)	That the Executive resolves to: a) Note the content of the report; b) Agree that the Local Plan focused consultation paper attached at Annex A be published for an extended period of stakeholder engagement (8-10 weeks) to help inform the preparation of the new Local Plan 2041; c) Authorise the Planning Policy Manager to make any necessary minor amendments to the focused consultation paper in liaison with the Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development, prior to consultation taking place.
Corporate priorities	The preparation of a new Local Plan for West Oxfordshire will help to support all of the Council's corporate priorities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All• Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>An initial consultation '<i>Your Voice Counts</i>' was held in late summer/autumn last year to kick start the process of preparing the new Local Plan.</p> <p>The focused consultation paper attached at Annex A seeks to move the discussion with stakeholders on, firming up on draft local plan objectives and outlining potential scenarios around the future pattern of development in West Oxfordshire.</p> <p>It also includes a call for sites, ideas and opportunities as to how land in the District might be used for different purposes.</p> <p>Subject to the agreement of the Executive, the consultation paper will be published for an extended period of stakeholder engagement, including a mixture of digital online consultation and in person events.</p> <p>The feedback received will then be used to help shape a series of preferred policy approaches which will be the subject of further consultation later in the year.</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the District Council has committed to a review of its current Local Plan which was adopted in September 2018. The new Local Plan will cover the 20-year period 2021 – 2041.
- 1.2 To help inform the new plan, Officers propose to carry out further public engagement over the summer.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to explain the nature of that further engagement and to provide an overview of the next steps involved in taking the Local Plan forward.

2. LOCAL PLAN 2041 – PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 Work on the new Local Plan began last year, with an initial 6-week consultation '*Your Voice Counts*' taking place from 24 August – 5 October. The purpose of the consultation was to seek early views on what issues the new Local Plan should focus on.
- 2.2 It was a predominantly online consultation but also included two face-to-face workshop events held with Town and Parish Councils and key stakeholder groups.
- 2.3 The consultation was very successful with over 5,000 online visits and 1,143 contributions from 441 respondents. Just under 3,000 people also signed up for future news updates.
- 2.4 Since the consultation closed, Officers have been carefully considering the responses received and in April, published a [consultation summary report](#) which provides an overview of the responses received both in quantitative and qualitative terms.
- 2.5 Generally speaking, the report demonstrates strong support for many of the initial topics and ideas put forward including the six main 'areas of focus' which formed the basis of the consultation. This is welcome and provides a good platform upon which to move the new Local Plan forward.
- 2.6 In addition to considering the consultation responses received, Officers have also been scoping out the supporting evidence which will be needed to underpin and justify the new Local Plan when it is considered at independent examination.
- 2.7 Work has been commissioned or is currently in the process of being commissioned on a variety of topics including Sustainability Appraisal (SA) Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) infrastructure delivery, housing and economic needs, viability, nature recovery and carbon impact. The evidence base will be further developed as the Local Plan progresses.

3. FOCUSED CONSULTATION PAPER

- 3.1 To help further inform the preparation of the new Local Plan, Officers propose to undertake a further focused consultation over the summer months. The intention is that this takes place in parallel with the preparation of supporting evidence outlined above, so that the Council is then in a position to publish a series of preferred policy approaches later in the year.

3.2 The focused consultation paper attached at Annex A comprises three main elements; draft Local Plan objectives, potential scenarios for the future pattern of development in the District and a call for sites, ideas and opportunities. Each aspect is further explained below.

Draft Local Plan Objectives

3.3 Based on the feedback received last year and also taking account of relevant national policy and Oxfordshire specific considerations, Officers have prepared a series of draft Local Plan objectives.

3.4 These are set out on a thematic basis for ease of reference but it should be noted that there are inevitably some overlaps between different objectives such as those relating to climate change, the environment and health and well-being.

3.5 As these objectives will ultimately form the basis upon which the new plan is prepared, it is important to gauge early feedback so that they can be refined as the plan takes shape.

3.6 The wording of each objective is presented along with a brief explanation as to why the objective has been prepared and an indication of the anticipated policy coverage when the Local Plan reaches a more advanced stage.

Potential Scenarios for the Future Pattern of Development in the District

3.7 In accordance with national policy, all Local Plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to meet development needs, aligns growth and infrastructure, improves the environment, mitigates climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapts to its effects.

3.8 The current Local Plan is based on a 'hierarchal' approach which, in summary, seeks to focus growth primarily at the three main service centres of Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton followed by rural service centres such as Eynsham and Woodstock with more limited growth then taking place in larger villages. Development in small villages, hamlets and open countryside is restricted to that which requires and is appropriate for a rural location.

3.9 Officers are keen to understand whether there is support for this approach being rolled forward in relation to any further planned growth or whether the new Local Plan should be looking to take a different approach.

3.10 The focused consultation paper therefore presents a series of different scenarios for the future pattern of development (beyond existing commitments), including:

Scenario 1 – Hierarchal Approach

- Essentially a business as usual type scenario, whereby the current hierarchal strategy of the adopted Local Plan is rolled forward to 2041. This would see growth continued to be focused primarily at the three main service centres of Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton followed by the rural service centres and larger villages.

Scenario 2 – Main Service Centre Focus (Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton)

- Under this scenario, there would be a greater focus on development taking place at the three main service centres of Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton and thus proportionately less growth at the rural service centres and villages.

Scenario 3 – Witney Focus

- Here, Witney would be the principal focus for development, with proportionately less growth then taking place at the other main service centres of Carterton and Chipping Norton and at the rural service centres and villages.

Scenario 4 – Carterton Focus

- Under scenario 4, Carterton would be the principal focus for development, with proportionately less growth then taking place at the other main service centres of Witney and Chipping Norton and at the rural service centres and villages.

Scenario 5 – Dispersed Growth

- Scenario 5 would see a more ‘dispersed’ pattern of growth, whereby there is less of a focus on growth taking place at the main service centres and rural service centres and a more even distribution of development across the District including at the villages.

Scenario 6 – Village ‘Clusters’

- Scenario 6 is similar to scenario 5 insofar as growth would be intentionally dispersed across the District but rather than individual villages being treated in isolation, they would be considered in ‘clusters’ based on the services and facilities they can collectively offer (e.g. education, retail, employment opportunities).

Scenario 7 – New Settlement

- Under scenario 7, future growth would be concentrated primarily in a single location in the form of a planned new settlement.

Scenario 8 – Public Transport Focus

- The final scenario relates to public transport availability and would see future growth focused along key public transport corridors and hubs.

3.11 The views which are received on these different scenarios will be taken into account alongside consideration of relevant supporting evidence (including housing and employment needs and sustainability appraisal) to help inform a preferred approach.

3.12 It should be noted that the scenarios presented are not mutually exclusive and it may be that a combination of certain elements is shown to be the most appropriate way forward.

Call for Sites, Ideas and Opportunities

- 3.13** A Local Plan is primarily a land-use document, setting out criteria-based policies to ensure that land is brought forward for appropriate uses in suitable, sustainable locations and allocating land for specific uses such as housing, employment and retail.
- 3.14** The third aspect of the consultation is therefore an open invitation for stakeholders to put forward their thoughts on how land across the District might be used in the future – effectively a call for sites, ideas and opportunities that can be further explored through the Local Plan as it takes shape.
- 3.15** The scope of this exercise is purposefully broad, seeking views on land that may be suitable for the following sorts of uses:
- New housing;
 - Employment;
 - Retail and other commercial development (e.g. hotels, leisure)
 - Community use;
 - Supporting infrastructure;
 - Green space provision;
 - Areas for nature recovery and biodiversity enhancements;
 - Renewable energy provision.
- 3.16** This list is not intended to be exhaustive – rather it is intended to provide an indication of the type of suggestions that Officers are looking for and all ideas will be carefully considered as the Local Plan is taken forward.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1** Subject to the approval of Members, the focused consultation paper attached at Annex A will be published for a period of public consultation beginning in August. To take account of the summer holiday period, an extended period of consultation of between 8-10 weeks is considered to be appropriate.
- 4.2** The consultation will comprise a combination of online digital engagement and in-person events, the nature and scope of which is currently under consideration. Further information on these consultation events and activities will be publicised in due course.
- 4.3** In parallel, Officers will continue to prepare and commission the supporting technical evidence that will be needed to further inform the content of the Local Plan and ultimately demonstrate its soundness when considered at examination.
- 4.4** Depending on the outcome of these two processes, Officers are aiming to be in a position to present and further consult on a series of preferred policy options later in the year before moving to formal publication and submission of the draft plan in 2024.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 5.1 The District Council could choose not to progress with an update of the Local Plan. However, local authorities are required to keep plans up to date, typically reviewing them every 5-years or so.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The preparation and adoption of a new Local Plan has significant financial implications with provision for this having been made through the District Council's budget setting process.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The report raises no direct legal implications. The Local Plan is being prepared in accordance with legislative requirements and when considered at examination, the appointed Planning Inspector will determine whether or not the District Council has fulfilled those requirements.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1 The report presents no significant risks.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1 The preparation of the new Local Plan will be subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment as it reaches a more advanced stage later this year and next.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As set out in Annex A, the climate and ecological emergencies are intended to form a central component of the new Local Plan and the policies contained therein.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None.