



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and Date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE – 14 FEBRUARY 2024</b>
Subject	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2041 UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Charlie Maynard – Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development. Email: <a href="mailto:charlie.maynard@westoxon.gov.uk">charlie.maynard@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Charlie Jackson – Assistant Director, Planning and Sustainability. Email: <a href="mailto:charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk">charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report Author	Chris Hargraves – Planning Policy Manager, Email: <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk">chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Purpose	To provide an update on the progress of the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 including the outcome of recent public consultation and the revised timetable for taking the plan through to adoption.
Annexes	Annex A – Consultation Summary Report – February 2024 Annex B – Local Development Scheme (LDS) Update – February 2024
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Note the content of the consultation summary report attached at Annex A, in particular the key themes arising which will be reflected in the next stage of Local Plan consultation; and</li><li>2. Agree to approve the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached at Annex B.</li></ol>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Putting Residents First</li><li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li><li>• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li><li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li><li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li></ul>
Key Decision	No

Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>Annex A provides a detailed summary of the previous Local Plan public consultation which took place from 30 August – 25 October 2023.</p> <p>The emerging Local Plan will be the subject of further informal public consultation in June/July 2024 as part of the Regulation 18 plan preparation stage.</p> <p>It is anticipated that there will then be a further, statutory 6-week period of public consultation at the formal Regulation 19 stage in November 2024.</p>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the District Council is in the process of producing a new Local Plan, which, when adopted, will replace the current Local Plan adopted in September 2018.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to summarise the progress which has been made to date and to explain the new timetable for taking the Local Plan forward to adoption.

## **2. PROGRESS TO DATE**

- 2.1 The new Local Plan is currently at the 'plan preparation' stage, under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 2.2 This is essentially the period within which the Council scopes the content of the plan and tests different options with a view to identifying a preferred approach.
- 2.3 Two major public consultations have been carried out so far including 'Your Voice Counts' in August 2022 and 'Your Place, Your Plan' in August 2023.
- 2.4 The purpose of the first consultation in 2022 was to seek early views on the scope of the new Local Plan asking a series of questions on potential areas of focus under six key themes.
- 2.5 The consultation attracted a very good level of response and a summary report highlighting the key issues raised has been published [online](#)
- 2.6 The second consultation in 2023 was intended to move the discussion on, looking at draft local plan objectives and policy topics as well as potential patterns of growth. It also included a call for sites, ideas and opportunities.
- 2.7 Section 3.0 below provides an overview of the second consultation.

## **3. 'YOUR PLACE, YOUR PLAN'**

- 3.1 The 'Your Place, Your Plan' consultation took place over a period of 8-weeks from 30 August – 25 October 2023.
- 3.2 The consultation comprised a mixture of digital engagement via the Council's online platform 'CitizenLab' and various 'in-person' events, including workshops and public exhibitions.
- 3.3 The consultation focused on three specific areas:
  - Draft local plan objectives – a series of draft objectives to help guide the future direction and content of the local plan;
  - The future pattern of development – 8 different scenarios for how future growth across the District might be distributed; and
  - A call for sites, ideas and opportunities – seeking views on how land within the District could be used in the future.

**3.4** In terms of submitted responses, the consultation generated a total of almost 2,000 comments from around 450 individuals and organisations, broadly grouped as follows:

- General public
- Landowners, developers and agents
- Local interest groups
- Statutory consultees
- Other local authorities
- Town and Parish Councils

**3.5** A consultation summary report has been produced and is attached at Annex A. The report provides a detailed summary of the responses received with a brief overview also set out below.

#### Draft Local Plan Objectives

**3.6** In general terms, of the 30 draft objectives identified, many respondents expressed strong support, particularly for those relating to climate change, healthy place shaping, environmental protection, housing and job growth and ensuring strong local communities.

**3.7** It was notable that a number of respondents, whilst supporting the general sentiment of the draft objectives, felt that they were too numerous, involved an element of repetition/overlap and in some cases potentially conflict with each other and/or lack precision.

**3.8** This suggests that there would be merit in ‘streamlining’ the draft objectives, potentially reducing them in number and ensuring that each one is internally consistent and sufficiently clear in terms of what it is seeking to achieve and the policies and proposals that flow from it.

**3.9** The detailed feedback received will be considered by Officers as the objectives are refined and used to inform the proposed policy content of the plan as it starts to take shape.

#### Pattern of Development

**3.10** The consultation sought views on 8 potential scenarios that could form the basis of the pattern of development (spatial strategy) for the new Local Plan. The scenarios included:

- Scenario 1 - Hierarchical approach
- Scenario 2 - Main Service Centre Focus (Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton)
- Scenario 3 - Witney Focus
- Scenario 4 - Carterton Focus
- Scenario 5 - Dispersed Growth
- Scenario 6 - Village ‘Clusters’
- Scenario 7 - New Settlement
- Scenario 8 - Public Transport Focus

- 3.11 These were included to stimulate some broad discussion around the respective merits of each approach. It was noted that the scenarios are not mutually exclusive and it may be that a combination of different approaches will ultimately be taken forward depending on feedback and evidence.
- 3.12 In purely quantitative terms, the scenarios which attracted the greatest degree of support from respondents included Scenarios 1, 2 4 and 8, whilst the scenarios which attracted the least support were 3, 5, 6 and 7.
- 3.13 138 separate emails were received in relation to Scenario 8, expressing particular support for the reinstatement of a railway line from Carterton to Oxford.
- 3.14 The detailed comments received will be considered by Officers along with supporting evidence in order to determine a preferred approach which will be the subject of further consultation later in the year.

#### Call for Sites, Ideas and Opportunities

- 3.15 The third aspect of the consultation consisted of an open invitation for stakeholders to put forward thoughts on how land in the district might be used in the future such as new housing, employment, infrastructure, community use, green space, nature recovery and renewable energy.
- 3.16 A large number of suggestions were put forward, ranging from specific sites to more general ideas and opportunities. A schedule of these is included in the consultation summary report at Annex A.
- 3.17 The majority of suggested sites relate to proposed housing and employment uses and the relative merits of these will be assessed as part of the evidence base underpinning the new Local Plan. This will include further engagement with Town and Parish Councils.
- 3.18 The various other suggestions received will also be taken into account through the development of the plan itself and through the preparation of relevant supporting evidence including in relation to infrastructure planning.

## **4. TAKING THE LOCAL PLAN FORWARD TO ADOPTION**

- 4.1 Building on the success of the first two stages of public engagement, Officers are keen to accelerate the progress of the new Local Plan and are now scoping the anticipated policy content taking account of previous feedback, national policy, best practice and emerging technical evidence.
- 4.2 The intention is that a series of preferred policy approaches will be the subject of further, informal Regulation 18 consultation in June 2024.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that this will lead to formal Regulation 19 public consultation on a submission draft version of the Local Plan in November 2024 and depending on the outcome of that stage, Officers anticipate being able to submit the draft plan for examination by April 2025 (or sooner if possible).
- 4.4 This would lead to examination hearing sessions in summer 2025.

- 4.5 This proposed timetable is set out in more detail in the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached at Annex B.
- 4.6 The LDS has also been updated to reflect the current position on a number of other planning policy documents including the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) and the Developer Contributions and Combe Village Design Statement Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) which were formally adopted in July 2023.
- 4.7 Subject to the approval of Members, the updated LDS will be published online and made physically available at a number of locations across the District.

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 By way of immediate next steps, both the consultation summary report (Annex A) and the updated LDS (Annex B) will be published online.
- 5.2 Officers will then scope and begin to draft the next consultation paper in advance of planned consultation in June. Supporting technical evidence on key topics such as housing and employment needs, sustainability and infrastructure delivery will be prepared in parallel.

## **6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 The Regulation 10A review of the current Local Plan carried out in September 2023 highlighted a number of policies which require updating, including those relating to housing provision.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 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.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The report raises no direct legal implications. The Local Plan will be 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.

## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 The report presents no significant risks.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 10.1 It is intended that an Equalities Impact Assessment will accompany the next stage of public consultation in June 2024.

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**11.1** The climate and ecological emergencies will form a central component of the new Local Plan and the policies contained therein.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**12.1** None.

(END)