



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 NOVEMBER 2024
Subject	WEST OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2041
Wards Affected	All
Accountable Member	Councillor Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Chris Hargraves – Planning Policy Manager Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Chris Hargraves – Planning Policy Manager. Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To provide an update on the emerging draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041, with particular regard to proposed national planning policy changes, and to agree a revised timetable for taking the plan through to adoption.
Annex	Annex A – Local Development Scheme (LDS) Update – November 2024
Recommendations	That the Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">Note the content of the report;Approve the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached at Annex A including the following key milestones for the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Regulation 18 preferred option consultation – May 2025- Regulation 19 pre-submission draft publication – October 2025- Submission for examination – March 2026
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Putting Residents First• A Good Quality of Life for All• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>The emerging West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 is currently at the Regulation 18 'plan preparation' stage, with two major public consultations having been carried out in autumn 2022 and autumn 2023. This has been interspersed with focused engagement with various key stakeholders.</p> <p>The original intention had been to undertake a further Regulation 18 'preferred options' consultation in October 2024, however, significant national planning policy changes were announced in July which have a direct bearing on the preparation of the new plan.</p> <p>As a result, the preferred options consultation will now take place in May 2025, followed by publication of the formal pre-submission draft plan in October 2025.</p> <p>Public consultation will take place in accordance with the Council's approved Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** Members will be aware that the District Council is in the process of producing a new Local Plan covering the period up to 2041.
- 1.2** Good progress is being made with preferred policy options currently being drafted and supporting technical evidence being prepared.
- 1.3** However, significant national planning policy changes were announced in July and these have a direct bearing on the new local plan. The purpose of this report is therefore to set out and agree a revised timetable for taking the new local plan forward.

2. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1** Work on the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 is now well underway. To date, there have been two main periods of public consultation which have been interspersed with focused engagement with key stakeholders.
- 2.2** The anticipated structure of the plan is now agreed and is expected to comprise a series of cross-cutting District-wide strategic policies, a number of geographically specific 'place-based' policies and a suite of development management policies.
- 2.3** Preferred policy options are currently being drafted, the intention being to set out the Council's preferred approach and in doing so, to explain why other approaches have been ruled out. The purpose of the preferred options consultation is to firm up on the overall content of the plan ahead of it being formally published.

3. IMPACT OF PROPOSED NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CHANGES

- 3.1** Earlier this year in July, the Government launched its consultation on proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other wider reforms to the planning system. A number of the proposed changes have direct implications for the preparation of the new Local Plan.
- 3.2** Of particular significance is the introduction of a new standard method for assessing housing need which, if introduced in its proposed form, would see West Oxfordshire's local housing need increase from 549 homes per year to 889 homes per year.
- 3.3** The results of the consultation are yet to be announced and the new NPPF is expected to be published early in the new year.
- 3.4** However, the direction of travel is clear and has a direct bearing on the new local plan including the number of site allocations that will be needed and supporting technical evidence on housing and economic needs, infrastructure provision and transport modelling etc.
- 3.5** Importantly, in recognition of the potential impact on local plans, the Government has pushed back the original deadline for submitting local plans for examination under the current system of plan-making from June 2025 to December 2026.
- 3.6** Reflecting the above, Officers have prepared a new local plan timetable as outlined below.

4. REVISED LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE

- 4.1 The timetable for taking forward the Local Plan is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS).
- 4.2 The most recent LDS was published in July but as outlined above, proposed national planning policy changes have necessitated a further update and a revised LDS is attached at Annex A.
- 4.3 Key milestones are therefore now expected to be as follows:
- Regulation 18 preferred option consultation – May 2025
 - Regulation 19 pre-submission draft publication – October 2025
 - Submission for examination – March 2026
- 4.4 It is important to note that between these specific stages, Officers will continue to engage with key stakeholders on a focused basis including the other Oxfordshire local planning authorities and other relevant bodies in accordance with the Duty to Co-Operate.
- 4.5 In updating the LDS, Officers have also taken the opportunity to update other aspects including the anticipated timing of the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP).

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 Subject to the approval of Members, the updated LDS will be published online and made available at a number of locations across the District.
- 5.2 Officers will continue to draft the Regulation 18 preferred options consultation paper and the relevant supporting evidence will continue to be prepared.
- 5.3 It is anticipated that the preferred option consultation paper will be brought to the Executive for agreement in March 2025 and that the 6-week public consultation would then begin in early May 2025.

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 must 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** An Equality and Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) of the Local Plan will accompany the next stage of public consultation in May 2025.

11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1** The climate and ecological emergencies form a central component of the emerging Local Plan.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1** None.