

Somerset West and Taunton Council

Executive – 20 November 2019

Local Plan Issues and Options Document – Approval for Public Consultation

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Mike Rigby

Report Author: Laura Higgins, Strategy Specialist

1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the first public consultation stage (the Issues and Options Document) in the Local Plan making process.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Recommendations are that Executive resolves to:

- 1) **approve** the Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan Issues and Options Document for public consultation (Appendix A);
- 2) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport, delegated authority is given to the Head of Strategy to make any necessary editorial corrections, minor amendments to the documents, agree the 'summary' section, and to agree the final publication style.

3 Risk Assessment

Description	Likelihood	Impact	Overall
Not undertaking this Issues and Options consultation will mean that the Council is less informed about the local issues that are important to residents, businesses and organisations. This would adversely affect the quality, robustness and soundness of the next stages in the Local Plan process.	Likely (4)	Moderate (3)	Medium (12)

4 Background and Full details of the Report

4.1 Somerset West and Taunton has the statutory responsibility to prepare a Local Plan which covers the whole of the new local authority area (excluding Exmoor National Park). It is a requirement that these Plans are kept up-to-date and fit for purpose, with

planning policy guidance advising on updating such Plans in whole (or in part) at least every 5 years.

- 4.2 Members will recall that the timetable for producing the Local Plan and other development plan documents (ie The Local Development Scheme) was approved at Full Council on the 16th July 2019. A copy of this document is available on our web site at: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/planning-policy/local-development-scheme/>
- 4.3 Members will also recall that an “Issues” document (draft) was considered at Scrutiny on the 12th June 2019 and Executive on the 18th June 2019. The decision was deferred at Executive to allow for full reporting of the Scrutiny recommendations. Officers subsequently recommended moving straight to a combined Issues and Options later in 2019 document to avoid consultation over the summer.
- 4.4 The West Somerset Local Plan was adopted in Nov 2016 and is deemed up-to-date at present as it is based upon the most recent housing need assessment guidance and adopted within the past 5 years. The Taunton Deane Core Strategy was adopted in September 2012 and its housing requirement figure was not based on the most recent housing need assessment. The Core Strategy is also more than 5 years old which is a threshold in the National Planning Policy Framework for determining whether a Plan is up-to-date. Given the position of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy, and the introduction of the Government’s Standard Method for calculating housing need, there statutory need to produce a new Local Plan.
- 4.5 The creation of the new Council administrative area provides a positive justification to producing a new Local Plan to reflect the aims, aspirations and direction of travel for the new Council. In accordance the Local Government (Boundary Changes) Regulations 2018, we must adopt a local development document under section 23 of the 2004 Act to apply to the whole of the area within a period of 5 years starting with the reorganisation date.
- 4.6 The geographical scope of the new Local Plan is the administrative boundary of Somerset West and Taunton but excludes the Exmoor National Park which has its own Local Planning Authority.
- 4.7 The Local Plan plan-making process must comply with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. We are at the very first stage of the process where we gather evidence, identify issues and present options for consultation (Regulation 18). Regulation 18 should involve some public consultation but it is up to the Council to decide what form this consultation takes and what each stage covers before the more formal consultation required at Regulation 19.
- 4.8 We have set out in the Local Development Scheme (for approval at Full Council on 16th July 2019) the timetable of the various stages of the Local Plan which is, in summary:

- Consultation on the Issues and Options Document (Reg 18) document in Q3 of 2019/20;
- Publication of a Draft Local Plan (Reg 19) in Q2 of 2020/21;
- Submit the Plan to the Secretary of State (Reg 22) in Q3 of 2020/21.
- Examination hearings (Reg 24) with appointed Planning Inspector - Q1 of 2021/22.
- Local Plan adopted in Q3 of 2021/22.

The Issues and Options Document (**Appendix A**) incorporates views made by the Local Plan Member Steering Group when the draft document was considered by them on the 23rd October 2019. Amendments were made to the document to that cover:

- Reference to the Equalities Action Plan;
- An explanation of carbon neutrality and increasing the emphasis of energy efficiency and renewable energy in achieving carbon neutrality ;
- Rewording the draft objectives to make them more focussed;
- Requiring cabling for electric vehicle charging or chargers in new development;
- Referencing support for community de-centralised renewable energy schemes;
- Adding clarity to the section on the settlements tiers;
- Amending text around lifetime housing;
- Requiring full-fibre connections to the cabinet and premises;
- Referencing the allocation of sites for tree planting;
- Referencing exploring opportunities for Local Green Space designations;
- Including a 'summary' section of the key messages

- 4.9 The Issues and Options document is the first stage Local Plan process. It sets out the draft objectives for the Local Plan and the social, environmental and economic issues we face in Somerset West and Taunton including any differences across the District. It includes proposed policies for the Local Plan and, where we are unsure of the best approach, reasonable options for policies that we could include. The consultation asks for views on the Objectives, Issues and Options presented.
- 4.10 The Issues and Options document will be desktop published before publication. Formal public consultation will be in line with our approved Statement of Community Involvement (see Agenda of this Committee) and is anticipated to take place for a period of 6 weeks from Monday 13th January to Monday 24th February 2020. As part of this we will hold some public exhibitions.
- 4.11 The document will be available (in its pre-desk top published form) prior to the formal consultation period as it is made publicly available for this Executive meeting. We also intend to consult on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and a Habitats Regulation Assessment (to avoid adverse impacts on sites and species of European importance) at the same time.
- 4.12 Following the consultation, we will review the comments received and produce a report which will form part of the evidence base for the next stage of the Plan-making

process. We will also be reviewing and updating the evidence base to inform the next stage.

5 Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities

5.1 A new Corporate Strategy to replace those previously prepared for Taunton Deane and West Somerset was approved at Full Council on 8 October 2019. The Local Plan is an important document which will help articulate and translate the Council's emerging strategic objectives into planning policy. This decision is linked to delivering the following Corporate Strategy themes:

- *“A low-carbon, clean, green and prosperous district that attracts high quality employment opportunities and encourages healthy lifestyles”*
- *“A district which offers a choice of good quality homes for our residents, whatever their age and income, in communities where support is available for those who need it”*

6 Finance / Resource Implications

6.1 The estimated cost for delivering the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation in this paper will be £2,000, to be spent on publicity and consultation during the 2019-20 financial year. The estimated cost for delivering the full completion of the Local Plan review will be £266,540, to be spent on evidence base studies and Examination in Public during the 2018-19 to 2021-22 financial years. Officer time has not been quantified as a cost but will be a priority call on existing staff resources.

6.2 £148,540 of these costs will be funded from existing resources held within the Local Plan earmarked reserve and it's requested that the remaining funding of £118,000 be included as a pressure within the MTFP (£82,000 within 2020/21 and £36,000 within 2021/22), this will be included within the budget setting reports to future meetings.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 The Council's Constitution describes how Somerset West and Taunton will discharge its responsibilities, including responsibilities for the preparation and adoption of the Local Plan, which must be considered and endorsed by Full Council, prior to adoption.

8 Climate and Sustainability Implications

8.1 The climate emergency, and our response to it, is a strong theme running throughout the document. The proposed policies aim to mitigate the climate emergency and adapt to its effects. It covers issues including reducing carbon emissions through walking, cycling and public transport, the location of development in sustainable locations, the energy efficiency of buildings, renewable energy, biodiversity enhancements, tree planting and flood risk. Comments on the Issues document by Scrutiny on 12 June 2019 helped embed this within the document.

8.2 The Local Plan is ultimately examined against its sustainability credentials as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. This is tested through an Examination in Public by an independent Planning Inspector and through Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment (Background Papers)

which will be prepared as part of the plan making process.

9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications

9.1 None at this stage.

10 Equality and Diversity Implications

10.1 None at this stage. In order to comply with the public sector equality duty: an Impact Assessments (IA) accompanies this series of reports and agenda items on the Local Plan (enclosed as Appendix B). Further Impact Assessments will be prepared in due course as part of the plan making process. Further, details of the process are also available from: <https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/your-council/equality-and-diversity/>

11 Social Value Implications

11.1 None at this stage.

12 Partnership Implications

12.1 As part of the Duty to Co-operate requirement (Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012), we will be expected to work with other public bodies, particularly neighbouring planning authorities and the County Council on any cross boundary strategic plan making issues to develop sound Local Plans.

13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

13.1 None at this stage.

14 Asset Management Implications

14.1 None at this stage.

15 Data Protection Implications

15.1 With permission from the consultee in line with the Guide to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), personal data will be collected as part of the consultation on the Issues and Options document.

16 Consultation Implications

16.1 The consultation on this document will be in line with the Statement of Community Involvement (see Agenda of this Committee). This is the first stage of the Local Plan process and no previous consultation on this document has taken place. The results of this consultation will inform the next stage.

17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s) (if any)

17.1 The main comments and recommendations of Scrutiny on 12th June revolved around the earlier but related "Issues" document being stronger on how the Local Plan should respond to the climate emergency and specifically referring to the Council's target of working towards carbon neutrality by 2030.

Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny – No**
- **Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency: Once only

List of Appendices

Appendix A	Local Plan Issues and Options Document for consultation
Appendix B	Equality duty: Impact Assessments (IA)

Background papers

- Draft Sustainability Appraisal Report and pre-Habitats Regulation Assessment
www.somersetwestandtaunton/localplan

Contact Officers

Name	Laura Higgins
Direct Dial	01984 600197
Email	l.higgins@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk