

**Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee**

Decision Date: 14 February 2024

Key Decision: no

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**Somerset Development Plan Biannual Update Report – February 2024**

Executive Member(s): Councillor Ros Wyke, Lead Member for Economy, Planning and Assets

Local Member(s) and Division: n/a

Lead Officer: Alison Blom-Cooper, Head of Planning

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**Summary / Background**

1. At the Executive committee meeting on 4 October 2023, the Local Development Scheme was approved. This sets out the timetable for the production of the Somerset Local Plan, and the Minerals and Waste Plan reviews. The Planning and Transport Policy Sub-Committee of the Executive was established at that same meeting to oversee and monitor progress against the Local Development Scheme.
2. At the first meeting of the Planning and Transport Policy Executive Sub-Committee on 19 December 2023, the committee agreed that a report on the progress of the Local Plan would be brought to this meeting. A biannual report frequency is recommended.

**Recommendations**

3. That the Sub-Committee of the Executive notes the report.

## Local Plan progress

4. Table 1 sets out the key milestones for the Local Plan as published in the Local Development Scheme<sup>1</sup>.

Table 1: Local Plan Milestones (Local Development Scheme Oct 2023)

Milestones	Dates
Commence project planning and evidence gathering	Apr 2023
Early engagement with internal and external stakeholders and further evidence gathering	Apr 2024 - Feb 2025
Regulation 18 consultation on Draft Plan	Apr 2025 - Jun 2025
Regulation 19 publication	Oct 2026
Submission for Independent Examination	Mar 2027
Inspector's Report	Feb 2028
Adoption	March 2028

5. The elements of the production that have been completed since April 2023 are:
- (i) Approval of the Local Development Scheme on 4 October 2023;
  - (ii) Adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement on 4 October 2023;
  - (iii) Establishment of the Plan-It Newsletter to inform local residents and businesses and to improve engagement. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition was published in December 2023;
  - (iv) Submitted a bid to the Government's PropTech fund to support the use of digital tools in the Council's Plan-Making;
  - (v) Briefs for the first phase of evidence gathering are either drafted or in preparation and we have received authorisation from the Contract and Procurement Control Board to go out to tender on those contracts. Other Council teams will be involved in the commissioning where the subject matter inter-relates. The early commissions will be:
    - a. Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment
    - b. Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1
    - c. Open Space, Built Sports and Playing Pitch Assessment

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<sup>1</sup> [Local Development Scheme \(https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/local-development-scheme/\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/local-development-scheme/)

- d. Landscape Character Assessment
  - e. Local Housing Needs Assessment
  - f. Economic Development Needs Assessment and Functional Economic Market Areas
- (vi) Early work/scoping has begun on internally produced evidence base:
- a. Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report
  - b. Role and Function of Settlements
  - c. Town Centre Health Checks
  - d. Custom and Self Build
6. The next steps are not as advanced as hoped at this stage primarily due to the Mendip Local Plan Site Allocations Review which has taken significant staff resources. The anticipated next steps are:
- (i) Complete any outstanding briefs for external contracts for the first phase of evidence gathering listed in paragraph 5(v) [Jan-Feb 2024]
  - (ii) Progress internally produced work/scoping in paragraph 5(vi) [Jan-May 2024]
  - (iii) Commence Spatial Portrait, visioning work (vision, issues and objectives) and early member engagement including links and alignment with the emerging Local Transport Plan [Jan-Jun 2024]
  - (iv) Commence Duty to Cooperate discussions [Apr 2024]
  - (v) Progress a Call for Sites for housing and employment sites [May 2024]

### **Minerals and Waste Plan Reviews**

7. Somerset Council are undertaking initial assessments of both the adopted Minerals Plan and Waste Core Strategy to understand which policies may be out of date for the purposes of decision making or where circumstances may have changed and whether the policies in the plan continue to be effective in addressing the specific local issues that are identified the plan. This in turn will enable Somerset Council to decide whether, and to what extent, an update of the policies is required.

Table 2: Minerals and Waste Plan Review timetables (Local Development Scheme Oct 2023)

Stage	Minerals Plan Review	Waste Plan Review
Commencement	Jul 2023	Nov 2023
Complete initial assessment of policies	Dec 2023	Feb 2024
Somerset Council to decide whether the adopted Plan remains effective or whether to formally update (in full or part) the Plan.	Early 2024	April 2024

8. The Minerals Plan review has commenced. It is anticipated that the work will be complete and a decision made by early 2024 as timetabled.
9. The Waste Plan review has commenced and the Waste Need Assessment (WNA) is complete. This is the first part of the picture of our future need and will guide the next stages of the review. This review uses the PAS Toolkit and follows the same Part 1 and Part 2 process, as for other Local Plan Reviews.

### **Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan**

10. The Local Plan aligns with the Council Plan 2023-27 vision and priorities, in particular the priority for *A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset*. Furthermore, the production of the Local Plan is consistent with the emerging Council Business Plan and reflects the Council's Climate Emergency Strategy. The Local Plan is one of a suite of strategic documents the Council will need to produce that support and complement each other. Using the vision and priorities set out in the Council Plan provides a starting point for developing agreed goals and ambitions in partnership with the community, businesses and the environment at the centre.
11. The Minerals and Waste Plans align with the Council Plan 2023-27 vision and priorities, in particular the priority for *A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset* and *A Flourishing and Resilient Somerset*. The production of a Waste Plan will support the circular economy in Somerset and reduce our impact on the environment. Planning for the supply of aggregates through the Minerals Plan is critical for the economy of Somerset.

### **Financial and Risk Implications**

12. Note that the Local Plan timetable has slipped during 23/24 and as a result there will be underspend in 23/24. However, this base budget provision will be needed in future years as the timetable catches up.

### **Legal Implications**

13. There are no legal implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **HR Implications**

14. There are no legal implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Other Implications:**

### **Equalities Implications**

15. There are no equalities implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Community Safety Implications**

16. There are no community safety implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

17. There are no climate change and sustainability implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Health and Safety Implications**

18. There are no health and safety implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

19. There are no health and wellbeing implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Social Value**

20. There are no social value implications of the recommendation to note this report.

### **Scrutiny comments / recommendations:**

21. The proposed decision has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee.

**Background Papers**

22. None

**Appendices**

23. None