

Worthing Local Plan – Issues and Options Consultation

Report by the Director for the Economy

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 A full review of the Core Strategy (to be replaced by a new Local Plan) is required to respond to significant changes to the planning system at the national level, particularly how local planning authorities need to plan for housing.
- 1.2 The work programme to progress a new Local Plan, set out in a revised Local Development Scheme, was published by the Council in March 2015. Since that time key elements of the evidence base have been updated and the Council is now in a position to publish the Issues and Options consultation document titled 'Your Town–Your Future'. This is the first stage of wider consultation which will help to influence how the town will grow and develop in the period up to 2033.
- 1.3 Following consideration at Planning Committee it is now recommended that the Executive Member for Regeneration approves the Issues and Options document for consultation.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Worthing Core Strategy was adopted in 2011 and the intention was that it would help to guide development in the Borough until 2026. However, it must now be reviewed to reflect latest national policy, particularly with regard to how Council's now need to plan for housing. Whilst much of the work in the Core Strategy is still relevant the new Plan, to be called a Local Plan rather than a Core Strategy, now needs to look ahead to 2033 and work out the best places for new housing and other growth to go. It is a statutory requirement for Council's to have an up-to-date Development Plan in place.
- 2.2 The new Local Plan will need to balance the benefits of 'growth' against the potential impact of future development and the need to protect the environment. To do this it will need to:

- Aim to meet the objectively assessed development and infrastructure needs

- Identify land where development would be inappropriate
- Contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment

- 2.3 The Council approved a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) in March 2015 which set out a commitment to review the Core Strategy and get a new Local Plan in place by 2018.
- 2.4 To ensure that the Local Plan is found sound when scrutinised at Examination it must conform to the national / regional context and be based on the latest evidence. Since the Council committed to review the Core Strategy work has focussed on updating key parts of the evidence base.
- 2.5 A Worthing Housing Study was published in June 2015 which provides an assessment of the objectively assessed housing needs (OAN) in the Borough. In addition, an Employment Land Review and a Landscape & Ecology Study are nearing completion and these will be published at the same time the Issues and Options consultation commences.
- 2.6 The Council is required to consult widely on the emerging Local Plan at a number of stages as it is being prepared. For the Worthing Local Plan the first main step in this process is the Issues and Options stage.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 The draft Issues and Options consultation document, titled 'Your Town—Your Future' is attached to this report as Appendix A. The purpose of this consultation is to invite comments from interested parties on all relevant topics to help identify the issues that the Council should address in the new Plan. Receiving comments at this stage will help to ensure that the Plan sets off in the right direction and covers the things it needs to cover. It will also help to inform what further evidence is necessary beyond that we have already collected or plan to collect. It is important to note that the Council is not, at this stage, proposing any policies or stating which sites should be allocated for development in the new Plan.
- 3.2 Using evidence and the outcomes from the first Local Plan Member workshop (September 2015) the draft document identifies the key challenges that will be faced over the Plan period and then proposes a Vision and a set of Strategic Objectives that will help to address these. The Vision and Objectives form a critical starting point for the new Local Plan and comments are invited on these overarching aims.
- 3.3 Whilst comments are invited on all aspects of the new Plan, the draft document helps to steer the debate by setting out some key questions as to how these challenges may be best addressed. The responses received on these issues will help to influence the subsequent drafting of the Plan.
- 3.4 Informed by the Council's emerging evidence base the draft document identifies the following key issues:

- Economy
- Retail and Town Centre
- Tourism
- Community and Leisure Facilities
- Transport
- Environment
- Housing
- Planning Policies (this covers all other areas of the Plan)

- 3.5 In addition, the document explains the very high levels of development needs in the Borough and the reasons why all possible opportunities to deliver this need will need to be considered as the new Local Plan is progressed. This part of the document is split into two sections: development options within the town; and edge of town development opportunities.
- 3.6 The section of the document that summarises the development options within the town includes a list of ten key sites where development is expected and supported over the Plan period. These opportunities will help to deliver regeneration and meet wider objectives. The sites are identified as 'Areas of Change', eight of which are already included in the Core Strategy. The two new sites identified are Centenary House and the HMRC Offices adjacent to Durrington Station.
- 3.7 The edge of town opportunities section includes a summary of the greenfield sites around the town that are being assessed to see whether they have any potential to deliver new development. It is important to note that the inclusion of a site in this list in no way indicates the Council's intention to allocate or support development. However, the Council must test all potential opportunities to meet identified needs. It will be evidence, which can include consultation responses, that will be used to help determine which (if any) of these sites should be put forward for development in the draft Local Plan to be prepared in the coming months. The Landscape & Ecology study referred to in the draft consultation document is one key piece of evidence when considering these sites but it should be noted that the findings from this study will need to be balanced with other evidence.
- 3.8 All Worthing Members were invited to the second Local Plan workshop on February 4th 2016. The workshop included a presentation of the Landscape and Ecology Study and consideration of the draft Issues and Options consultation document (which was circulated to all Members in advance of the workshop). A summary report of the workshop has since been circulated and this explains that Members in attendance were broadly supportive of the approach proposed.
- 3.9 Members that attended the workshop made a number of comments in relation to consultation methods. It was suggested that a wide range of methods (e.g. social media, local press etc) could be used alongside the more 'traditional methods' to ensure that the consultation reached the widest possible audience. Officers in the Planning Policy team are currently working on a consultation strategy with the Council's Communications team and this will be considered by the Local Plan Working Group prior to the consultation commencing.

4.0 Worthing Planning Committee 9th March 2016

- 4.1 Worthing Planning Committee considered the draft consultation document and covering report on 9th March. In general, Members were supportive of the Issues and Options document which they felt covered all of the relevant issues and topics.
- 4.2 The importance of effective consultation was agreed by Members as this would ensure that stakeholders and the public were involved at the start of the process and that comments received could help steer the Plan in the right direction. To achieve this, Members supported the use of a range of consultation methods to ensure that all sectors of the population were engaged in this process. Officers explained that a Communications Plan was being prepared and that this would go beyond the more 'traditional' methods used during previous planning policy consultations. The draft Communications Plan will be considered by the Local Plan Working Group at their next meeting.
- 4.3 With regard to the timing of the six week consultation the report to Planning Committee explained that the May 5th local elections are of some relevance. Whilst the consultation document is not setting or proposing Council policy the report questioned whether Members would prefer to delay the consultation until after the election date rather than run the Issues and Options consultation over the election period.
- 4.4 Although Members acknowledged that there would be some sensitivities during the consultation they did not necessarily feel that this was reason enough to delay its launch until after the election. As such, it was generally agreed by Committee Members that the consultation should start as soon as was practicably possible.
- 4.5 In this regard the Council's Legal representative at the Committee meeting explained that purdah period before the election is of relevance. The Government's Conduct of Elections Guidance (2014) states that no public consultations dealing with local issues should be launched during the election period. Furthermore, the 'Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity' (2014) states that '.....it is increasingly common that new consultations are not published during the pre-election period, in particular on any matter that may be considered politically sensitive or play into issues affecting the campaign.'
- 4.6 With the advice above in mind there is insufficient time to get the necessary Executive Member approval before the purdah period kicks in. As a consequence it is suggested that the six week consultation period will start during week commencing 9th May 2016. Whilst this will result in a slight delay (around 2 to 3 weeks) it provides sufficient time to prepare for the consultation and get an effective Communications Plan in place.

5.0 Legal

5.1 The Worthing Local Plan will be prepared in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Localism Act 2011.

6.0 Financial implications

6.1 There will be some printing and advertising costs associated with the first stage of consultation on the new Local Plan. These will not be significant and will be funded through existing budgets.

6.2 However, there are some further, and more significant, costs attached to the progression of a new Local Plan. Most of these costs relate to the evidence base required to make informed decisions within the Plan but there are also cost associated with the Examination. The production of the Local Plan, as timetabled in the Local Development Scheme, is to be funded by the existing service budget.

7.0 Recommendation

7.1 The Executive Member is recommended to:

- approve for consultation the draft Issues and Options document (Appendix A); and
- that any subsequent minor revisions to the document will be delegated to the Director for the Economy or, in his absence, the Head of Economic Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Regeneration.

Local Government Act 1972

Background Papers:

- Draft Issues & Options Consultation Document (Appendix A)
- Local Development Scheme 2015
- Worthing Core Strategy 2011
- Report to Worthing Planning Committee 9th March 2016

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Schedule of Other Matters

1.0 Council Priority

- 1.1 This report does not link to any Corporate Priority however the Local Plan is a key document that, when adopted, will support many council priorities. It will:
- support major regeneration projects to tackle deprivation;
 - support businesses in creating jobs and regenerating neighbourhoods;
 - seek to meet the housing needs of our communities;
 - work with partners to reduce deprivation and inequalities.

2.0 Specific Action Plans

- 2.1 The timetable for the progression of a new Local Plan is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (2015)

3.0 Sustainability Issues

- 3.1 The Government requires that all Development Plan Documents (including Local Plans) be subject to a formal sustainability appraisal. The Local Plan will aim to promote sustainable development.

4.0 Equality Issues

- 4.1 The Plan will be the subject of an Equalities Impact Assessment. It will aim to ensure that all groups in Worthing have equal access to the spatial opportunities offered by the new Development Plan. For example, the provision of affordable housing and sustainable transport initiatives are key issues to be addressed through the new plan to help promote equal opportunities.

5.0 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- 5.1 The new Local Plan will consider community safety issues.

6.0 Human Rights Issues

- 6.1 Matter considered – no specific issues identified.

7.0 Reputation

- 7.1 The delivery of a new Local Plan will meet the spatial needs of the Borough and therefore have a positive impact on the reputation of the Council.

8.0 Consultations

- 8.1 Formal and informal stages of consultation with the public and all relevant stakeholders are integral to the development of a new Local Plan. As a minimum, consultation will be undertaken in line with the Joint Adur and Worthing Statement of Community Involvement (Dec 2012).

8.2 Members of the Council (particularly the Local Plan Member Working Group) will be involved in the progression of the new Local Plan at all appropriate stages.

9.0 Risk Assessment

9.1 There is a statutory duty on the Council to produce an up-to-date Development Plan. Failure to meet the milestones as set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme could impact on a number of this Council's priorities including economic and social regeneration as well as the delivery of affordable housing.

9.2 Failure to get a new Development Plan in place in a timely manner may impact on local control when determining applications and increase the risk of speculative development proposals.

10.0 Health & Safety Issues

10.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

11.0 Procurement Strategy

11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified

12.0 Partnership Working

12.1 The Government's Duty to Co-operate places a requirement on Local Planning Authorities to work with neighbouring authorities to address strategic issues. Work to address this need is on-going and will continue as the Plan is advanced.

12.2 Given that the Local Plan for Adur District Council is well advanced, officers will consider best practice and elements/policies in that Plan that will also be relevant to the new Worthing Local Plan. Where appropriate, evidence studies will be procured jointly with Adur DC and other neighbouring planning authorities.