

5 December 2023		ITEM: 5
Planning Transport & Regeneration Overview & Scrutiny		
Local Plan Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: no	
Report of: Mark Bradbury – Director of Place		
Accountable Assistant Director: Tracey Coleman – Interim Chief Planning Officer		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

There is a statutory requirement placed on all Local Authorities to have an up-to-date Local Plan in place and for the Local Planning Authorities to review their plans every five years. This Council's current 'Local Plan' was adopted 8 years ago.

This report describes the process that Council will be asked to approve to take the Local Plan Forward.

A report seeking approval to commence consultation on the Thurrock Local Plan: Initial Proposals document and the Initial Proposals Integrated Impact Assessment will be presented to an extraordinary meeting of Council on 6th December.

This consultation will enable the Council to receive comments on the proposed way forward for the plan before the Council move to the next stage of a fully worked up draft Local Plan for consultation.

If approved, consultation will commence later in December and run for a minimum of 8 weeks. After the consultation period has ended, the Council will need to consider all received comments, prepare additional technical evidence, and potentially undertake a series of focussed engagement activities with some stakeholders to better understand the comments raised and try to agree a pathway forward.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 To note that Council will be recommended to approve the contents of the Thurrock Local Plan: Initial Proposals document (Regulation 18) for public consultation.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Local Plans set out the future land use and planning policies for the borough over a set time frame. Their main purpose is to ensure that new development comes forward in a way that responds positively to the needs of local people and businesses as well as environmental challenges and opportunities.
- 2.2 Local Plans are key in making decisions on future planning applications in the area, alongside national planning policy, other development plan documents, made neighbourhood plans and other supplementary guidance.
- 2.3 The process for preparing a Local Plan is set out in national legislation and guidance. The preparation of the new Local Plan has been underway now for several years. In that time, the Council has undertaken a range of formal and informal consultations with local communities and other stakeholders to inform both the emerging Plan and key pieces of evidence.
- 2.4 Consultation on the Thurrock Local Plan: Initial Proposals document (Initial Proposals document) will form part of the Regulation 18 stage of plan making, which is described as the 'preparation' stage of the plan and still offers the Council the opportunity to amend the plan considering comments and input received.
- 2.5 Consultation on the Initial Proposals document will enable the Council to gain additional insights on the proposed structure of the emerging Local Plan and potential growth areas. Comments received in response to the consultation and any subsequent informal engagement activities will be used to help refine options for policy directions and growth areas and inform the Publication Draft Plan (Regulation 19) which is anticipated to be consulted upon in late 2024.
- 2.6 Information set out in the Initial Proposals document has been informed by both technical evidence that has been prepared or commissioned by the Council and the views of key stakeholders including: elected Members; statutory stakeholders; residents; local businesses; developers, landowners, and their agents.
- 2.7 Following the Initial Proposals document consultation there will be a need to prepare additional technical evidence and undertake further engagement with some stakeholders to better understand their perspectives and ensure that policies in the plan are deliverable and, more importantly, sets out the right policies to enable areas to change, grow and adapt in the right way.
- 2.8 Council will also be asked to approve a suggested approach to stakeholder engagement up to but not including consultation on the Publication Draft Plan (Regulation 19).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 There is a statutory requirement placed on all Local Authorities to have an up-to-date Local Plan in place and for the Local Planning Authorities to review their plans every five years. The Council's current Local Plan (Core Strategy and Policies for Management of Development) is over 8 years old. As such, we have a statutory duty to review and update policies in our existing Plan. This means that a 'do nothing approach' is not a viable option.
- 3.2 When drafting a new Local Plan, the Council must follow a set procedure created by national government. If we do not adhere to this process, then there is a risk that the Plan will be deemed 'unsound' at the Examination in Public.
- 3.3 Regulation 18 is defined within the regulations as the 'preparation' stage of plan making. To fulfil the requirements of Regulation 18, we need to make sure that we have told relevant stakeholders that we are preparing a Plan and invite them to make comments on what the Plan should contain. The Council has already undertaken 2 formal consultations and other more informal engagement and has therefore already met the legal requirements for the 'preparation' stage and could technically progress straight to preparing and consulting upon a Publication Draft (Regulation 19 – final consultation stage before the document is submitted to the Secretary of State).
- 3.4 However, we believe that progressing to the final formal consultation stage (Regulation 19) without having a more focussed conversation with communities and other stakeholders on potential growth locations first may result in us putting forward a new Local Plan that does not fully appreciate or reflect the needs and wants of local communities and other key stakeholders which would potentially mean having to undertake a further consultation and/or important information being missed – which could mean that the Plan may be found unsound at examination.
- 3.5 The Initial Proposals document will give communities and other stakeholders the opportunity to meaningfully shape the content of the Plan prior to final decisions being made on potential planning policies and development sites. Feedback from the Initial Proposals consultation (and any subsequent informal consultation activities) will be used to inform the policy directions and site allocations in the Publication Draft (Regulation 19) which is anticipated to be subject to consultation in late 2024.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The terms of reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the Council's constitution confirms they will: -

Review and scrutinise the decisions made by, and the performance of, the Cabinet, Committees, and Council Officers, both in relation to individual decisions and over time.

- 4.2 There is no provision for Overview & Scrutiny Committees to review and scrutinise the decisions made by full Council. The recommendation is therefore to note that Council will be recommended to approve the contents of the Thurrock Local Plan: Initial Proposals document (Regulation 18) and approve it for public consultation.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Development of the emerging Local Plan has been supported by the Local Development Plan Taskforce who are scheduled to meet 4/5 times a year. Over the last few years, members of the Local Development Plan Taskforce and Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny (PTROS) have had the opportunity to scrutinise emerging evidence and feed in their views regarding priorities for the emerging Local Plan.
- 5.2 Unfortunately, the LDP Taskforce has not been in quorum this year and the remaining meetings have been cancelled. The Council are currently reviewing its committee structure for 2024/25 and it is likely that the LDP Taskforce will be disbanded.
- 5.3 In the lead up to the extraordinary Council meeting, officers hosted a series of meetings on potential growth options. These meetings were open to all Elected Members but were not public meetings. The Local Plan team hosted 5 sessions and in total 21 Elected Members engaged with these sessions. A further session has been arranged for 4th December.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance, and community impact

- 6.1 The new Local Plan will play a key role in creating the right conditions for places to grow, change and adapt over the next 15-20 years and, as a result, it will need to appropriately respond to existing/adopted and emerging strategies that have a spatial element.
- 6.2 The new Local Plan also has strong links to the Council's adopted Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The HWB Strategy notes that the health and wellbeing status of individuals and communities is driven by broad and complex influences including income, housing, access to green spaces, transport, and active travel and to truly level the playing field, there is a need for the authority to take a broad approach and focus on all these areas as part of place-shaping.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Finance Manager

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Caroline Robins**
Locum Principal Solicitor

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities

There are no Diversity & Equality Implications arising from this report

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Local Plan – Issues and Options (Stage 1 and Stage 2) - <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/new-local-plan-for-thurrock/issues-and-options>
- There are several technical evidence and supporting documents that have been used to help inform emerging policy directions these documents can be accessed via <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/new-local-plan-for-thurrock/evidence-to-support-local-plan>
- Integrated Impact Assessment – Initial Proposals Draft – a hard copy of this document has been made available in Group Offices. If the Initial Proposals document is approved for consultation, then the Integrated Impact Assessment will be published on our website and made available for consultation alongside the Initial Proposals document.

9. Appendices to the report

- There are no appendices.

Report Author:

Mark Bradbury, Director of Place