

19 July 2020

Local Development Plan Task Force

Thurrock Local Plan – Next Steps

This report is Public

Executive Summary

This report summarises the steps that the Council proposes to take to prepare a sound Local Plan in accordance with all relevant legal and procedural requirements and consistent with national policy. It provides an update to the previous Thurrock Local Plan - Next Steps Report which the Task Force considered at its meeting on 8th March 2021.

1. Introduction and Background.

- 1.1 This Report provides an update to the previous Thurrock Local Plan – Next Steps Report which was considered by the Taskforce at its last meeting on 8th March 9th 2021.
- 1.2 Despite the problems caused by lockdown, significant progress has been made in moving the Plan forward with a particular focus being on the development of the Local Plan evidence base.
- 1.3 Further progress has also been made in rolling out Local Plan Planning Performance Agreements with landowners and developers promoting sites and in building up towards the launch of the Community Design Charrettes which will now start in September.

2 Progress in developing the Local Plan Evidence Base

- 2.1 With the objective of preparing a Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan for public consultation in mid-2022, the Council has commissioned a wide range of technical studies to inform the production of the Plan. The technical studies which have been commissioned or are in the course of being commissioned since the beginning of 2021 are set out in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Key Local Plan Studies commissioned in 2021

- South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment
- Thurrock Housing Urban Capacity Study
- Thurrock Housing Sites Assessment Study
- Thurrock Economic Developments Needs Assessment Update
- Thurrock Employment Land Availability Assessment Update

- Thurrock Centres and Urban Capacity Study
- Call for Sites Transport Connectivity Site Assessments
- Thurrock Transport Baseline Study
- Connecting Thurrock –Vision 2050 Vision Statement
- Interim Transport Strategy/Thurrock Transport Strategy
- Thurrock Strategic Transport Model
- Strategic Development Area Transport Access Strategies
- Thurrock Local Plan Infrastructure Baseline Study
- Thurrock Climate Change Strategy
- Thurrock Energy Strategy
- Thurrock Design Strategy Update

2.2 Further work will be commissioned over the next 12 months so that by this time next year the Council will be in a position to better understand the scale and spatial distribution of its future development needs with regard to the technical themes set out in Figure 2.

Figure 1 - Key Local Plan Deliverables 2021

Housing

- The number of homes we must plan for, including the identification of affordable and specialist housing needs;
- An assessment of the capacity of brownfield and Town Centre sites to meet future housing needs and reduce the need for Green Belt development;
- The assessment and identification of sites to meet the Boroughs future housing needs;
- The identification and development of a housing delivery strategy to ensure the phased development of sites and supporting infrastructure to meet future housing needs, including specialist and affordable housing requirements.

Economy

- The number of jobs we must plan for by economic sector;
- The capacity of existing employment sites to meet future needs and/or the need for additional allocations to support economic growth and diversify the Borough's economic base;

- The development of an Employment Land Delivery Strategy which identifies the need for infrastructure, accessibility or other improvements required to bring sites for development;
- An assessment of the potential for pursuing the development of a 'lift and shift' strategy to remove bad-neighbour uses from established residential areas;
- The amount of future retail, leisure and other town centre uses to be provided over the plan period together with the development of a Borough-wide strategy for accommodating these needs.

Transport

- An assessment of current and future transport needs, capacity constraints and opportunities;
- The development of a Borough-wide Transport Strategy which sets out a range of policy and infrastructure interventions to support growth, and meet the Council's other key policy priorities in respect of Climate Change, Air Quality and Health and Well-Being;
- The ongoing development of costed proposals to support the future development of the Boroughs strategic growth areas and the promotion of sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling and rail freight as a means of reducing car use and freight movements by road;
- The development of a range of transport models to test the effectiveness of a range of transport interventions in terms of capacity, safety and air quality considerations.

Community Infrastructure

- The identification of current and future community infrastructure needs, deficiencies and opportunities at a Borough-wide and Ward based level;
- The production of place - based Infrastructure Delivery Plans for each strategic growth location which identifies the required Community, Transport, Utilities, Green and Blue infrastructure, together with proposed funding and delivery mechanisms;
- The production of a Borough-wide Infrastructure Delivery Plan underpinned by funding agreements with key delivery partners, including Government, infrastructure providers and service providers, and land owners and developers;

- A CIL Charging Schedule which sets out a strategy and priorities for delivery to be funded by landowners and developer through the capture of a CIL.

Environment

- A full and transparent assessment of the environmental, sustainability and health impacts of the emerging development plan (policies and proposals);
- The identification of required mitigation strategies and proposals to address the impacts of the Plan on a range of key environmental considerations including, Climate Change, Flood Risk, Energy, Water resources, Landscape and Green Belt, Air Quality and, Health and Well-Being.

Place

- Place based regeneration and development strategies for key growth locations across the Borough;
- Strategic Area Development Frameworks and Master Plans;
- Inset Plans for Strategic Growth Areas;
- A new Borough-wide Design Strategy and supporting Design Guides and Codes

2.3 It should be noted that progress on completing the work streams identified above will be largely dependent on the availability of resources and the ability of the Council to manage and mitigate the impact of outside influences on the plan-making process. These include Covid-19, Government Policy, Local Government reorganisation, the Lower Thames Crossing and the availability of scarce technical and professional resources.

3.0 Member Engagement

3.1 In view of the importance of achieving effective Member engagement in the Plan process, work is underway in preparing a Member Engagement Strategy which will mirror the staged preparation of the Thurrock Plan and provide an opportunity for all Members to engage fully with the process. Although the detailed staging of activities is currently being worked up, it is envisaged that the programme for engaging with Members should be integrated and be delivered at the following levels:

- Leaders Group

- All Member Briefings – Evidence and Strategy Development
- Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny
- Local Development Plan Taskforce

3.2 It is hoped that by adopting a front-loading approach towards engaging Members in the plan-making process, it will be possible to achieve broad and early support for the Plan which will assist the process move forward quickly through the various statutory stages toward submission and adoption.

4.0 **Thurrock Design Charrettes – Progress Update**

4.1 The roll out of the Thurrock Design Charrette process commenced in December 2020 with the launch of an online Consultation Portal. This was quickly followed by a series of 8 Design Charrette Workshops across the Borough involving landowners, scheme promoters and developers who are currently promoting sites for allocation through the Local Plan. A note summarising progress on the Charrette process to date is attached as Appendix 1 to this Report.

4.2 The Design Charrette workshops have been very well attended and have been invaluable in deepening and developing a shared understanding of the issues and opportunities associated in taking for the future development of 8 areas under consideration (Bulphan, Chadwell St Mary, Corringham, East Tilbury, Horndon on the Hill, South Ockendon, Orsett and Stanford-le-Hope).

4.3 The information obtained from these discussions will now be used to help inform the wider plan-making process including the nature and scope of the evidence needed to support the production of the Local Plan. The information generated will also be used to help inform the Community Design Charrette Workshops which will now be held in September and October 2021. The Community sessions were due to held during spring 2021, but unfortunately had to be postponed until the autumn due to the impact of Covid19 restrictions which would have limited the Councils ability to effectively engage with Local Communities.

4.4 Further progress reports on the roll out of the Design Charrette process will be provided to the Taskforce over the course of the year as work progresses over the summer and into the autumn.

4.5 Following the conclusion of the public consultation process work will then begin on the production of a series of reports and Development Frameworks which will establish a vision and guiding principles to steer the future development of the Charrette areas. It is intended that the place based Development Frameworks will sit alongside the formal Local Plan assessment of individual sites and their suitability for allocation in the Plan.

5.0 **Member Action Points**

- 5.1 At the previous meeting on 8th March, Members asked for a number of Reports to be prepared for consideration at the next meeting of the Taskforce. Requested were updates on the following:
- Sustainable Travel;
 - Number of homes to be delivered by the Local Plan;
 - The impact of COVID-19 on the Local Plan

Sustainable Travel

- 5.2 The emerging Local Plan has a significant role to play in delivering a wide range of Council priorities and its production will be informed by on-going work in preparing or updating a number of other Corporate Strategies. Of major importance to the Local Plan process is the need to prepare a new Thurrock Transport Strategy (TTS) which fully supports the delivery of the Local Plan as well as the Council's wider transport, economic, health and environmental objectives.
- 5.3 At the previous meeting of the Task Force, Members received a report setting out progress in preparing the Transport Strategy and requested a further update on the preparation of the transport evidence base at this meeting. In response to this request, Officers will provide a verbal update on progress at this meeting prior to the preparation of a further Report and presentation at the next Taskforce Meeting (27th September) on the Connecting Thurrock – Vision 2050 which is currently in production and sets a draft sustainable transport vision to support the future development of Thurrock and the delivery of the Local Plan.

Number of homes to be delivered by the Local Plan

- 5.4 Members further requested additional information on the number of homes to be delivered by the Local Plan. At this stage of the process it is not possible to accurately identify the number of new homes which need to be delivered by the Local Plan due to the continuing uncertainty surrounding the Governments attempts to revise the Standard Method used to calculate each Local Authorities future housing requirements. It is entirely possible that there will be further changes to the Standard Method in the coming months and the Council will need to keep this matter under review as it progresses its production of the Local Plan.
- 5.5 A further factor which hinders the ability of the Council to accurately forecast its future housing needs is the fact that the housing requirement generated by the Standard Method is just the starting point in terms of considering the future needs of an area. Associated with this is the need for Local Authorities to consider further whether there is a need to uplift their future housing requirements to support wider economic growth objectives and priorities. This is the case in places such as Thurrock where significant levels of employment growth are envisaged over the plan-period to 2040 which will generate additional demands for new housing over and above that required to meet demographic needs.

- 5.6 In order to be able to identify the scale of the housing uplift needed to support economic growth, including the successful delivery of the Thames Free Port, the Council will need to await the completion of the South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the Thurrock Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) which will provide more detailed information on the Boroughs future housing and employment needs. Both studies are scheduled for completion in autumn 2021 and a further Report will be taken to the Taskforce on this matter which will set out the detailed calculations which sit behind the Borough's Local Plan housing targets.
- 5.7 It is often the case that discussions on Local Plans become focused simply on *'the numbers'*, while at the same time, losing sight of the crucial role that the plan-making process has to play in driving forward the place-making and transformational change.
- 5.8 At the heart of the plan-making process is the concept of 'spatial planning'. This is also called 'place shaping' and has a wider focus than traditional land use planning. It's about identifying a vision for the future of a place which responds to local needs and circumstances, including community views, and is based on evidence. This vision is translated into priorities, policies and the identification of land for development. Spatial planning creates a framework for private investment and regeneration. By agreeing a delivery plan, it seeks to co-ordinate and deliver public-sector parts of the plan with other agencies. Spatial planning should set a positive framework for action on climate change, and contribute to sustainable development.
- 5.9 Reflecting this approach, it is important not to view 'the numbers' as being a problem, but more often being an opportunity to address existing housing and, infrastructure deficiencies as well as wider climate change and health and wellbeing objectives. Equally, through support for 'good growth', it is possible to promote the regeneration of older areas and secure the creation of more attractive and better designed places within which to live, work and play.
- 5.10 The development of the Local Plan evidence base has a crucial role to play in not only informing decisions on the scale of growth that is required to meet the future needs of Thurrock, but also in terms of how this growth potential can be harnessed to meet the needs of the local community. As work on the plan continues, Members will be kept informed of the progress been made in identifying the Borough's future housing and employment needs as well as the options and opportunities available to meet these needs in a sustainable and deliverable way which benefits the different communities and localities which make up the Borough, prior to the preparation and consultation on the draft Local Plan in 2022.

- 5.11 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will have significant and potentially long lasting economic, social and environmental impacts all of which could have profound impacts on how we will live, work and travel in the future. Notwithstanding the inherent difficulties this poses for the plan-making process in terms of trying to predict what this all means in relation to the demand for and use of land and infrastructure, the Government still requires that all local authorities should have an adopted Local Plan in place by December 2023.
- 5.12 Although Government has published guidance for Local Authorities on how to undertake community and stakeholder engagement during the pandemic, it has not provided any advice to local authorities on how they should take into account the impact of Covid-19 on planning policy development. It is therefore left to individual authorities to determine what policy approaches should be developed at a local level to promote future economic recovery and meet the needs of local communities. In doing so local authorities will still need to have full regard to Government policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guide (PPG) when it comes to determining the scope and content of their Local Plans.
- 5.13 Although it is still too early to determine what the long term implications of the pandemic will be for the plan-making process, it is clear that the Covid-19 has already had a significant impact in re-shaping the planning landscape in terms of where people want to live and work, and on how they shop and move around. The key Covid-19 challenges and issues arising which will need to be considered in the preparation of the Thurrock Local Plan are set out in Figure 3.0.

Figure 3.0: Key Covid-19 challenges for the Local Plan

Migration patterns and housing markets

- Increased housing pressures on outer London areas, Small towns, Rural locations, and Coastal locations.
- Rise in purchase of second homes/holiday lets
- Impact on population projections
- Change in rates of build between areas
- Impact on affordability
- Demand for community infrastructure

The need and desire for space

- Gardens
- Home offices
- Access to good green space from the home
- Focus of building on where there is space to build
- Impact on densities and land take

Centres – workspace, and shopping

Workspace

- Economic bounce back – but a different economy?
- Demand levels for permanent offices
- Demand levels for shared office space
- Digital Infrastructure – Working From Home
- Many businesses making decisions to reduce their estate
- Office is unlikely to die, but small shifts will have major impacts on the market, the costs for businesses, and the knock on effect on business that support office workers in a locality
- Alternative uses for workspace?
- Expected increase in unemployment post furlough

Retail

- Demand for retail space?
- Comparison Shopping – Bricks and mortar v Internet
- Convenience Shopping - The Big Shop V Shop Local v Home delivery
- Shopping related to gardens and homes
- Contraction of retail core provides space for:-
 - New Homes
 - Extra leisure
 - Places for home workers to meet

Social hubs

- Continued demand for places to meet, to eat, to socialise •
- More local demand may rise for services and certain retail •
- Centres retain Civic and community role - places where people meet and enjoy cultural and leisure activities.

Transport patterns

- Trends in travel - WFH
- Some reduction in commuting levels may continue
- Reduction in travel for meetings?
- Less use of public transport impacting on viability and routes
- Foreign travel costs rising
- Impacts on regional airport locations?
- More travel within the UK for leisure
- Air quality impacts negative

The resilience of the city - Centre for Cities

- Large part of economic damage appears temporary

- Mistake to assume period of long term contraction due to short term shock
- But risk of permanent shift to working from home, consuming less within city centres, impact on prospects of lower skilled
- Return to offices needed
- Encouragement to use Public Transport needed
- Action on Air Quality needed

5.14 In order to address the challenges identified above, it is essential that the preparation of the Local Plan is based on a sound evidence base which considers a range of different growth and development scenarios which enables the Local Plan to any changes in circumstances in a flexible way. It should also be noted that Government now expects Local Authorities to review their Local Plans every 5 years to ensure that they remain up-to date and relevant in planning for the future development needs of the area. The adoption of this approach would also provide the Council with an early opportunity to re-assess the Local Plans spatial strategy and policies and to update them in the light of the availability of better information than currently exists on the medium to long term impact of Covid19 on the future planning of Thurrock.

9. Appendices to the report

- Thurrock Local Plan Community Consultation Briefing – July 2021

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