

24th JANUARY 2022

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN TASKFORCE

LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Executive Summary

This paper sets out the proposed structure, scope and content of the Thurrock Local Plan and seeks feedback and comment.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that the planning system should be plan-led and that up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.

1.2 The NPPF requires that Plans should:

- a) Be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development;
- b) Be prepared positively, in a way that is aspirational but deliverable;
- c) Be shaped by early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, business, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees;
- d) Contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals;
- e) Be accessible through the use of digital tools to assist public involvement and policy presentation; and
- f) Serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area (including policies in this Framework, where relevant).

The plan-making framework

1.3 The process of preparing a Local Plan is heavily regulated with Local Planning Authorities required to have regard to national policy as set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended). Plan-makers are also required to have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which set in policy and guidance on the nature and content of Local Plans.

1.4 The NPPF requires that development plans must include **strategic** policies to address each local planning authority's priorities for the development and use

of land in its area, and **non-strategic** policies which set out a more detailed policy framework for the consideration of different types of development.

Strategic policies

- 1.5 Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for:
 - a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure, and other commercial development;
 - b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
 - c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
 - d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 1.6 Plans should make explicit which policies are strategic policies. These should be limited to those necessary to address the strategic priorities of the area (and any relevant cross-boundary issues), to provide a clear starting point for any nonstrategic policies that are needed.
- 1.7 Strategic policies should look ahead over a minimum 15 year period from adoption, to anticipate and respond to long-term requirements and opportunities, such as those arising from major improvements in infrastructure. Where larger scale developments such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns form part of the strategy for the area, policies should be set within a vision that looks further ahead (at least 30 years), to take into account the likely timescale for delivery. Broad locations for development should be indicated on a key diagram, and landuse designations and allocations identified on a policies map.
- 1.8 Strategic policies should provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward, and at a sufficient rate, to address objectively assessed needs over the plan period, in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This should include planning for and allocating sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area.
- 1.9 Where a single local plan is prepared the non-strategic policies should be clearly distinguished from the strategic policies.

Non-strategic policies

- 1.10 Non-strategic policies should be used by local planning authorities and communities to set out more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development. This can include allocating sites, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing

design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and setting out other development management policies.

The Emerging Thurrock Local Plan

2.1 In order to coordinate the production of the Local Plan work has is now underway on the preparation of a Framework Version of the Thurrock Plan. This responds to the requirements set out in the NPPF in terms of the scope, nature and content of planning policy required to manage the future development of Thurrock and is structured as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Our Borough
3. Key Issues and Challenges for the Future
4. Our Vision For Thurrock
5. The Spatial Strategy
6. Strategic Policies – (See Appendix x)
7. Spatial Planning Areas
8. Development Policies
9. Appendices

Preparing the Plan

- 2.2 The preparation of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies set out in the Local Plan. Given the scale and complexity of the Thurrock Local Plan, it has been necessary to commission a significant number of technical studies to ensure that the plan is positively prepared (meets future development needs); justified (based on evidence); effective (deliverable over the plan period); and consistent with national policy.
- 2.3 While the process of building the evidence base is ongoing and will continue in 2022, this doesn't mean the preparation of the Local Plan itself needs to await the conclusion of this process, as meaningful progress can be made on an interim basis in preparing those elements of the Plan which are less reliant on evidence development.
- 2.4 To illustrate this, much of **Section 1 - Introduction** already exists in the Local Plan Issues and Options 2 Consultation Document (2019) and requires only limited amendment or additional text for it to be inserted into the Draft Plan.
- 2.5 Similarly, **Section 2 - Our Borough** involves the preparation of a spatial portrait of Thurrock which can be prepared by using information already to hand.
- 2.6 **Section 3** also exists in part with the **Key Challenges and Objectives** having been the subject of public consultation as part of the earlier Issues and Option Consultation. Further work will need to be undertaken to ensure that any revised version of this Chapter of the Local Plan is consistent with the emerging evidence base with this work already underway.

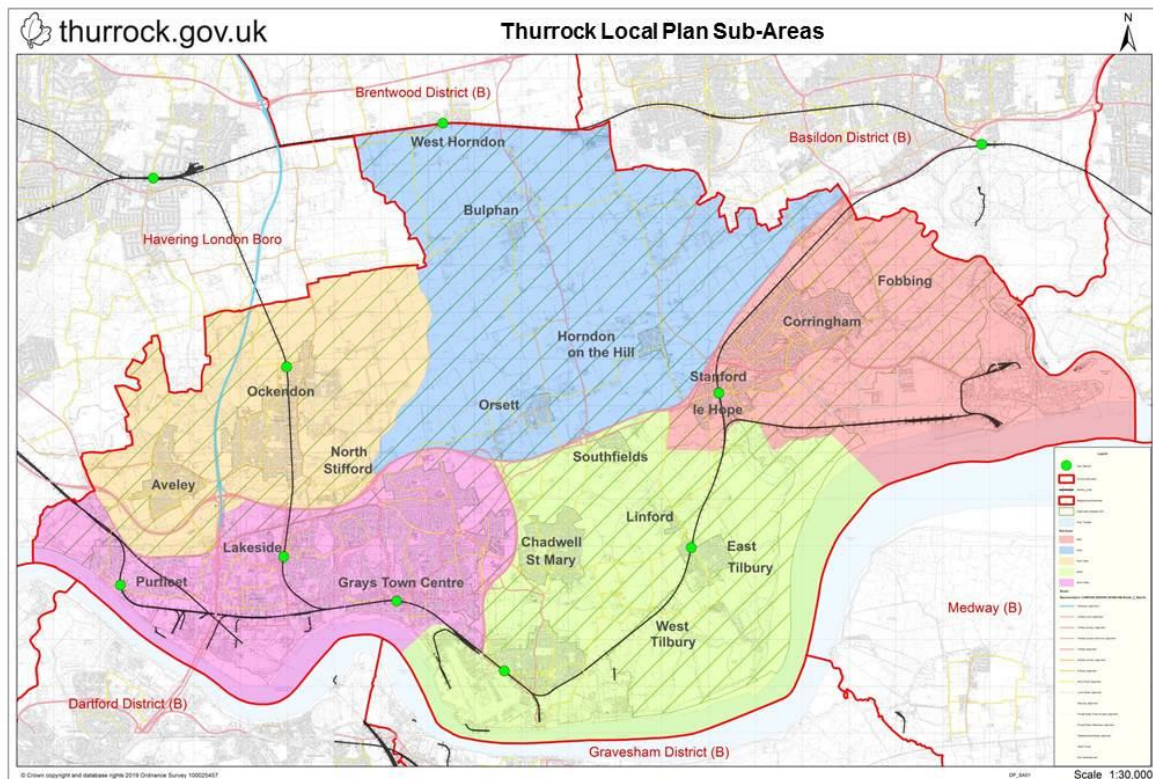
- 2.7 While it is not possible to make significant progress in drafting the Spatial Strategy, the Strategic Policies or Spatial Planning Area policies at this time pending the development of the evidence base, it remains possible to begin production of many of the non-strategic policies, particularly where they relate to Development Management matters which are not place specific. Typically, this involves adopting and adapting policies taken from recently adopted Local Plans and shaping them so that they properly reflect the context and needs of the Borough.
- 2.8 The Framework version of the Local Plan adopts a 'cookie cutter' approach to identifying the planning policy areas which will need to be considered as part of the plan-making process. This is considered useful in the first instance as it sets out a check list against which further thought and consideration can be given to refining and reducing down the number of policies required to deliver a sound Local Plan.
- 2.9 **Appendix 1** sets out the proposed Strategic and Non-Strategic policies to be contained within the Plan and the views of Members are welcomed on whether the suggested policy areas are sufficiently comprehensive in providing an appropriate future planning framework for Thurrock.

Spatial Planning Areas

- 2.10 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.
- 2.11 Reflecting this approach **Section 7 - Spatial Planning Areas** adopts a tiered approach and divides the Borough into five place based Character Areas which share common characteristics, functional relationships, challenges and opportunities. [See figure 1 below]
- 2.12 The purpose of identifying these areas is to provide the right spatial geography for planning for transformational change at a greater than local area level, particularly where the development and managed growth of a number of settlements will be shaped or reliant on the provision of new strategic infrastructure including, for example, better transport connectivity, new secondary school provision or the creation of the SEE Park.
- 2.13 For each of the Boroughs Spatial Planning Area's it is proposed to prepare a **Strategic Area Development Framework** which will set out the future scale and distribution of development, key regeneration priorities and supporting

infrastructure for incorporation within the Local Plan and to provide a sound basis for developing the supporting policy framework.

Figure 1 - Thurrock Local Plan Spatial Planning Areas



- 2.14 This work will have a key role in ensuring that the wider benefits of strategic housing growth and the development of the Free Ports are realised and that future strategic transport investment is maximised and delivered to support future growth and accessibility to the opportunities created.
- 2.15 Within each of the Spatial Planning Areas it is also proposed to identify a number of **Strategic Growth Areas** focused on those areas identified in the plan where major growth, regeneration and change is being proposed.
- 2.16 The Strategic Growth Areas identified will include the Borough's larger town centres and/or surrounding strategic urban extensions, possible new settlements and the Free Ports. For each of these locations it is proposed to prepare a Concept Plan and supporting Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Transport Access Strategy which will articulate a co-ordinated strategy for managing their future regeneration and growth. The outputs of this work will then be used to underpin the preparation of a series of Inset Plans for incorporation into the Local Plan.
- 2.17 In terms of timescales, Officers are working to prepare a Draft Local Plan for Senior Officer and Members to review in June / July. This version of the document will include the Vision, Spatial Strategy, Strategic Growth Areas and Sites, and Development Management Policies. Subject to endorsement from

senior Officers / Members, the plan will then need to be considered by Full Council to be released for public consultation.

Member Engagement

2.18 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 Local Plan and provide an opportunity for all Members to engage fully with the process. Although, the detailed staging of activities has yet to be worked up, it is intended that the programme for engaging with Members should be integrated and delivered at the following levels:

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

2.19 It is hoped that by adopting a front-loading approach towards engaging with 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,

Appendices to the report

- Proposed Strategic and Non-Strategic policies (Appendix 1)

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