

LOCAL PLAN - ISSUES AND OPTIONS - CONSULTATION UPDATE

Planning Advisory Committee - 23 November 2017

Report of	Chief Planning Officer
Status	For information
Also considered by	Cabinet - 7 December 2017
Key Decision	No

This report supports the Key Aim of Protecting the Green Belt.

Portfolio Holder	Cllr. Piper
Contact Officers	Antony Lancaster, Ext. 7326 Hannah Gooden, Ext. 7178

Recommendation: To note the findings of the recent Local Plan Issues and Options consultation, which will inform the production of the draft Local Plan.

Reason for recommendation: To enable progression of the new Local Plan

Executive Summary

- 1 The Local Plan Issues and Options consultation is the largest consultation that the Council has ever undertaken and we have received over 15,000 responses to the household survey, which represents a 30% response rate. Numerous events and workshops have been held over the nine-week consultation period, to fully engage members of the public and local stakeholders. This level of engagement is very encouraging and will allow a Plan to be drafted that reflects the views and aspirations of the local community.

Background

- 2 The Issues and Options Local Plan consultation ran for nine weeks from 3 August - 5 October 2017. The period was extended (from the statutory 6 weeks) due to the summer holidays falling within the consultation period.
- 3 A number of engagement events were held with local stakeholders and members of the public, including:
 - Agents and Landowners Forum

- Duty to Co-operate sessions
 - Place-making workshops with town/parish councils and local members (6 events across the District)
 - Public “drop-in” sessions in Sevenoaks / Swanley/ Edenbridge / Westerham / New Ash Green
 - Secondary school consultation sessions
 - Family fun days
 - Rail station leafleting
 - Social Media presence
- 4 A special edition of ‘In Shape’, dedicated to the Local Plan consultation was sent to all addresses in the District in August, providing a summary of the Issues and Options Document, full details of the public engagement opportunities and encouraging responses. A survey was then sent to all households in the District, and a reminder was sent approximately three weeks later to those who had not yet responded.
- 5 The survey was sent to approximately 50,000 households and we had hoped for a 15-20% response rate (i.e. 10,000 responses). In fact, we have now received over 15,000 responses which represents a 30% response rate. We have employed market research consultants (Lake) to help us process and analyse this large volume of predominantly quantitative data. All but one of the household survey questions had a sliding scale response (i.e. strongly agree to strongly disagree), with the final question allowing free text. The results of the survey are summarised below.
- 6 In addition to the household survey, we asked a number of technical questions, predominantly aimed at local stakeholders, neighbouring authorities and agents/developers. We have received approximately 200 responses covering both technical and site specific issues which are summarised below.

Consultation Events

- 7 This section provides a brief summary of the various consultation events that took place during the consultation period.

Agents Forum:

- 8 About 70 developers and agents attended the Forum that was held at the Stag Plaza on the 17th August. The Issues and Options document was introduced to those who attended by outlining some context about the District’s landscape and demographic. The presentation highlighted the headline needs we are addressing in the plan, before explaining our preferred ‘combined’ development strategy. Those who attended were split

up into smaller groups to discuss a couple of technical questions, as well as some more general questions on existing policies used in SDC. These were then fed back to everyone and key themes began to arise across the different groups. These themes included; possible further investigation into weakly performing Green Belt and greenfield sites on the edge of existing settlements, more clarification on what constitutes exceptional circumstances, continuing and extending our pro-active approach in identifying Brownfield Land, have a deeper focus on farming and the rural economy and address the 'clunky-ness' of our online proposals map.

Duty-to-cooperate Forum:

- 9 Two duty-to-cooperate workshops took place, one with neighbouring authorities on the 23rd August and the other with statutory consultees on the 24th August. Both followed a similar format to that of the agent's forum. However, the key themes that arose were quite different. There was much discussion on expanding our evidence base to address air quality and light pollution within the district, with additional work needed on biodiversity. It was highlighted that more detail needs to be provided about the design required for future development, to make it more aesthetically pleasing as well as improving health living. There was recognition of new infrastructure being needed across the district, including for health and education, in order to release pressure on existing services. New/improved infrastructure should be identified and delivered, preferably alongside, or ahead of, site allocations. The top transport concerns included the cumulative impact of future development on our local highways and all M25 junctions in the district, as well as the limiting capacity on the direct London rail routes.

Place-making Workshops:

- 10 The Place-making Workshops took place in the week commencing the 4th September and covered our six place-making areas. Town and parish councils and local ward members were invited representatives attended from the areas highlighted in bold:

The Upper Darent Corridor consists of **Westerham, Brasted, Sundridge and Chevening.**

The Darent Valley comprises of **Farningham, Eynsford, Shoreham, Otford and Kemsing.**

The North East covers **Horton Kirby and South Darenth, Fawkham, West Kingsdown, Hartley and Ash-cum-Ridley,**

The Sevenoaks Urban Area and Surrounds covers **Dunton Green, Riverhead, Sevenoaks, Sevenoaks Weald and Seal.**

The South consists of **Edenbridge, Hever, Chiddingstone, Leigh, Cowden and Penshurst.**

The North West comprises of **Hextable, Swanley, Crockenhill, Badgers Mount**, Halsted and Knockholt.

These workshops followed a similar structure to both the Agent's and Duty-to-Cooperate forums with an introductory presentation into our Issues and Options document, followed by a discussion around the relevant section of the document for each place-making area.

- 11 Different key themes arose across the different place-making areas. The Upper Darent Corridor voiced concerns over the Westerham relief road proposals and the weight given to community objections. The Darent Valley expressed a need for smaller units in their existing settlements but voiced concern of traffic management and the need for new infrastructure. The North East saw discussion around affordable housing and the need to improve public transport, with support for our preferred strategy. The Sevenoaks Urban Area and Surrounds highlighted their apprehension in new development coming forward without the necessary infrastructure. The South discussed building appropriately sized homes for the need within the different areas and maximising supply of smaller units in villages that have been washed over by the Green Belt. The North West expressed reconsideration of the place-making areas and concerns surrounding development of more housing with local infrastructure already strained.

Public drop-in sessions:

- 12 Public drop-in sessions were held in week beginning 11th September in Sevenoaks, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green. These sessions were well-attended and provided the opportunity for members of the public to read through our consultation boards, ask us questions about the consultation, collect additional copies of the survey and supporting information and engage with us in the Local Plan process. It also enabled us to encourage responses via the household survey.

Hard to reach groups

- 13 It was recognised that there are certain groups that often fail to fully engage in our Local Plan consultations, including young people, young families and commuters. Therefore, we organised consultation workshops within several secondary schools (Knole Academy, Orchards Academy and Sevenoaks School) where over 200 surveys were completed, we attended several SDC family fun days in August, where parents completed the surveys and handed out leaflets at railway stations to encourage commuters to respond. We also had an active social media presence, with Facebook posts and regular SDC tweets encouraging engagement in the consultation.

Household Survey Results

- 14 In order to ensure that all residents had an equal opportunity to give their view, all households within the Sevenoaks district (50,774 households) were invited to participate in the consultation.

- 15 In total, 15,375 people responded to the main Consultation, either via a postal questionnaire or online survey completion. The main Consultation comprised of 14,319 paper questionnaire completions and 1,056 online survey completions. We would like to thank all those who took the time to complete the Consultation and give their views.
- 16 The Consultee profile below shows the breakdown of those responding to the Consultation:

Profile of those responding to Consultation	
Gender of respondent	
Male	48%
Female	52%
Prefer not to answer	2%
Age of respondent	
Under 16	0.1%
16 - 17	0.1%
18 - 24	1%
25 - 34	5%
35 - 44	10%
45 - 54	16%
55 - 64	20%
65 and over	43%
Prefer not to answer	4%
Disabled as set out in Equality Act 2010	
Yes	12%
No	82%
Prefer not to answer	6%
Working status of respondent	
Employee in full time job	26%
Employee in part time job	9%
Self employed full or part time	10%
On a government supported training programme	0.06%
In full time education at school, college or university	0.3%
Unemployed and available for work	1%
Permanently sick / disabled	2%
Wholly retired from work	41%
Looking after the home	5%
Something else	2%
Prefer not to answer	4%
Children aged 17 or under living in household	
None	76%
One	8%
Two	9%
Three	2%
More than three	0.4%
Prefer not to answer	3%

Base: Various for each question (unweighted between 14,604 and 15,164)

- 17 The following table shows the percentages of those responding to the Consultation compared to the District population breakdown according to 2014 population estimates (Mid 2014 Population Estimated for England and Wales, Source: Office for National Statistics). This comparison indicates that younger age groups were under-represented in the consultation, the middle-age group (45-65) was proportionately represented and older age groups were over-represented. This is in line with previous Local Plan consultations that we have undertaken.

Profile of those responding to Consultation

Gender of respondent	Consultation response	Profile of area
Male	48%	48%
Female	52%	52%
Prefer not to answer	2%	2%

Age of respondent	Consultation response	Profile of area
16 - 24	1.2%	1.2%
25 - 44	1.6%	30%
45 - 64	3.6%	35%
65 and over	4.3%	23%
Prefer not to answer	4%	

Base: Various for each question (unweighted between 14,845 and 15,164)

3

- 18 The sample was particularly robust due to the number of responses received. Lake Market Research (who have assisted the Council in processing and analysing the results) have stated that the results are accurate to a confidence interval of +/- 0.7% at the 95% confidence interval. This gives a high level of confidence in the results of the survey.
- 19 The headline summary pie charts of the responses to the 12 household survey questions are attached at Appendix 1. All results are based on unweighted data from consultees completing the questionnaire.
- 20 The district-wide results are based on a five point rating scale from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' as well as a 'No opinion' option. Consultees who selected 'No opinion' or chose not to provide an answer have been excluded from the chart calculations pertaining to the percentages used to generate the charts. Therefore, each question has a different base size. Responses from the secondary school age mini Consultation (approximately 200 responses) are not included in the main Consultation results charts.
- 21 In terms of key results, Objective One (Promoting Housing Choice for all), set out that we can continue to protect the Green Belt by building homes in our existing built up areas or on previously developed land. The trade off is new developments will have to be built at slightly higher densities. Green Belt land will only be considered if it re-uses previously developed land or very rarely in 'exceptional circumstances'.

- 22 There is strong support (92% agree/strongly agree) for protecting the Green Belt by using previously developed land (Q1) and support (56% agree/strongly agree) for protecting the Green Belt by building at slightly higher densities (Q2).

Question	Support/Strongly Support	Oppose/Strongly Oppose
Q1 - Brownfield	92%	5%
Q2 - Higher Density	56%	30%
Q3a - Draft Northern Sevenoaks Masterplan (whole District response)	66%	13%
Q3b - Which Way Westerham (whole District response)	54%	19%
Q4 - affordable housing	84%	9%
Q5a - connections	95%	4%
Q5b - green infrastructure	96%	3%
Q5c - new technology	86%	12%
Q6 - efficient use of employment land	92%	3%
Q7 - vibrant economy	89%	3%
Q8 - healthy town centres	91%	3%
Q9 - Infrastructure	91%	2%
Q10 - healthy communities	93%	1%
Q11 - green spaces	93%	2%
Q12 - greener future	92%	2%

*these do not sum to 100% as there is a 'neither agree or disagree' category.

23 Analysis of Question 3a (Draft Northern Sevenoaks Masterplan) and 3b (Which Way Westerham) has been undertaken at the local level, in order to understand local support/opposition:

Question 3a - Draft Northern Sevenoaks Masterplan results:

Area	Support/Strongly Support	Oppose/Strongly Oppose
District-wide	66%	13%
Sevenoaks North	67%	20%
Sevenoaks wards, Otford, Dunton Green, Kemsing, Seal	69%	18%

Question 3b - Which Way Westerham

District-wide	54%	19%
Westerham and Crockham Hill	22%	73%

Pie charts outlining these results are included at Appendix 1.

Technical Responses

24 In addition to the household survey, the consultation document posed a number of ‘technical questions’ that were primarily aimed at local stakeholders, developers and duty to co-operate partners, such as neighbouring authorities. We have received approximately 200 responses covering both technical and site specific issues which are outlined below. A list of the public bodies that responded is included at Appendix 2 and summaries of the key organisational responses are included at Appendix 3.

25 In summary, some of the key issues that were raised are:

- Need for services to support housing - such as GPs, schools, roads and public transport - needs to be front-loaded, not just housing. Close partnership working with Kent County Council ongoing to ensure timely delivery.
- Careful consideration of the Green Belt is required - and a preference was expressed for building on brownfield (previously developed) land

- Concerns about impacts from major roads - congestion, air pollution, noise
- Need to provide homes and services for older people
- Tourism / rural economy / broadband

26 There are 47 technical questions covering the six key objectives of the Plan and place-making areas. Summaries of the key points raised in relation to the six objectives are outlined at Appendix 4.

Next Steps

27 A summary of these results will be communicated to the District in the December edition of In Shape.

28 We have identified a number of areas where further evidence is required (e.g. transport, biodiversity, viability - in relation to affordable housing, commercial development and whole plan viability) and this work will be undertaken over the next few months, with a progress report to be considered by PAC in January 2018.

29 We are currently drafting the new Local Plan, reflecting the views of local people, and intend to bring a Draft Plan to PAC and Cabinet in March 2018 for consultation next spring.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

The option not to progress a new Local Plan would leave the Council open to reputational damage and likely Government intervention to produce a Local Plan for the District Council.

Key Implications

Financial

Production of the Local Plan will be funded from the Local Plan reserve.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

Preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory requirement. There are defined legal requirements that must be met in plan making which are considered when the plan is examined by a Government Planning Inspector. Risks associated with Local Plan making are set out in the Local Development Scheme.

Equality Assessment.

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the

Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The preparation and adoption of a Local Plan will directly impact on end users. The impacts will be analysed via an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) to be prepared alongside each key stage of plan making.

Conclusion

The Sevenoaks District Local Plan 2015 - 2035 Issues and Options document represents the first public consultation in the process of preparing a new Local Plan to replace the adopted Core Strategy 2011 and Allocations and Development Management Plan 2015. The document reflects other strategic documents of the Council in particular the Corporate Plan, Community Plan and the emerging housing and economic development strategies. It is backed by a substantial evidence base assembled over a two year period. The nine-week public consultation and engagement period has encouraged a substantial response, which will continue to be analysed and will inform the draft Local Plan, which will be prepared for a further round of public consultation next spring.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Household Survey Pie Charts
(separate document)
Appendix 2: Organisational response list
Appendix 3: Summary of key responses
Appendix 4: Summary of responses by Objective

Background Papers

[PAC key progress reports](#)
[7 July 2015](#) [Local Plan Work Programme](#)
[19 April 2016](#) [Local Plan Work Programme](#)
[21 June 2016](#) [Local Plan Update](#)
[22 September 2016](#) [Local Plan Update](#)
[16 May 2017](#) [Local Plan Update](#)
[22 June 2017](#) [Local Plan - for consultation](#)

Richard Morris
Chief Planning Officer