

## LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Development and Conservation Advisory Committee - 19 October 2021

**Report of:** Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services

**Status:** For Information

**Executive Summary:** This report provides an update on the Local Plan and outlines the next steps in the plan making process.

**This report supports the Key Aims of:**

Protecting the Green Belt

Supporting and developing the local economy

Supporting the wellbeing of residents, businesses and visitors

Ensuring that Sevenoaks remains a great place to live, work and visit

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr. Julia Thornton

**Contact Officer:** James Gleave ext. 7326

**Recommendation to Development and Conservation Advisory Committee:**

That the report be noted.

### Background and Introduction

- 1 Members were last updated on the Local Plan in July, when Officers briefed them on the emerging evidence base and the next steps to move the plan forwards, including discussions with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This report provides an update on these points and should be read in conjunction with the separate report on the Local Development Scheme (LDS), which sets out the next steps for the plan making process.

### Discussions with MHCLG

2. The latest position on discussions with the Minister of State for Housing and representatives from MHCLG was reported in July. Significant progress has been made since this time.
3. A meeting took place with representatives from MHCLG on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2021. Discussions were constructive and positive, with some clear conclusions on

how the Council could progress an updated Local Plan. Specific issues raised during the course of the discussion were:

- We were successful in proposing a four-fold increase in housing, whilst taking the local community with us. It is disappointing and frustrating that such a significant increase was not accepted by the Inspector;
  - Collectively, there are lessons to be learnt from SDCs experience of plan making;
  - The Council highlighted the steps it has taken to put a plan in place as soon as possible;
  - Existing evidence should be used as a basis for an updated plan;
  - Where necessary, new evidence is being prepared and updated to support policies and allocations;
  - The importance of a ‘route map’ with the Planning Inspectorate was emphasised. The Council noted it was producing an up to date LDS and would make this available as part of forthcoming discussions;
  - Significant changes to the planning system are on the horizon and should provide greater clarity for proposed site allocations;
  - The Council should not aim for a hybrid document that incorporates elements of the Planning White Paper;
  - We should, however, seek to ‘future proof’ the updated Local Plan, so that it is not out of date at the point of publication;
  - The Council should aim to have a plan in place by 2023 to avoid the complexities of transition to a new planning system; and
  - The Ministry understood the Council’s frustrations and was keen to assist in progressing the plan through to examination.
4. It was agreed that a series of meetings would be held with representatives from MHCLG and the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), during the preparation of the updated Local Plan. Members will be informed on the outcome of these discussions in subsequent reports.

#### **Updated Evidence Base**

5. Members were given an overview of emerging evidence base documents in July. The following paragraphs provide an update on these studies.

#### **Town Centre Strategy (TCS)**

6. The Strategic Planning and Economic Development teams have jointly commissioned Allies and Morrison (A&M) to prepare the TCS, which will cover Sevenoaks town, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham and New Ash Green. This study will play an important role in helping to shape the future of these town centres and in particular, will:
- Ensure the continued vitality and viability of our town centres, in the light of changing shopping patterns and permitted development rights;

- Consider how town centres can respond to the social and economic shifts arising from the global pandemic;
  - Provide up to date town centre and retail evidence for Local Plan policies and site allocations;
  - Develop a clear vision for town centres and a governance structure to ensure the strategy is implemented;
  - Inform the Council's Economic Development Strategy, which sets out the major priorities for economic development in the District over the next three years; and
  - Provide a basis to secure funding for town centre improvements and assist with regeneration plans for Council owned sites.
7. Throughout October, A&M will be undertaking community engagement, consulting with a number of stakeholders who are involved in town centre management including councillors, town/parish councils, neighbourhood planning groups, chambers of commerce and members of the public. A member briefing will also be arranged in November to discuss the draft strategy. The TCS is due to be finalised in December 2021.

#### District-wide Character Study (DWCS)

8. An update on the DWCS was also provided in July. The inception meeting took place at the beginning of September and the appointed consultant (also A&M) is in the process of gathering evidence on the key historical, physical, social and socio-economic characteristics of the District. This information will be mapped and launched as an initial StoryMap - an online interactive website which summarises the key findings.
9. The StoryMap will include a survey to capture residents' views and experiences of the places they live. The information captured through the survey will feed into the second stage of the project; an analysis of area types, building typologies and the changes that are influencing place shaping across the District, such as Covid-19, demographic shifts and climatic effects. An engagement workshop will take place in mid-November to test the findings of the analysis. The final stage of the study will be to report on all the information gathered, with a follow-up workshop in mid-January 2022.
10. The study will result in a report and an interactive website (StoryMap) showing the past, present and likely future character across the District, with key themes and recommendations as part of the analysis output. The report will influence more detailed emerging design codes, allocations for new development in the Local Plan and will be a material consideration in the consideration of future planning applications.

#### Targeted Review of Local Housing Needs (TRLHN)

11. Officers have been working closely with the Arc4, the consultants commissioned to undertake the TRLHN. The study builds on the housing needs evidence in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) from 2015, to bring it up to date. Specifically, the study will set out an updated need for affordable homes, tenure requirements for affordable housing and determine

the level of discount required for First Homes. The data will be analysed down to placemaking level, recognising that housing needs differ across the District.

12. The emerging findings of the study were presented to members at virtual workshops on 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September. The evidence will be used to inform both Local Plan preparation and the Council's emerging Housing Strategy.

#### Settlement Capacity Study (SCS)

13. The development strategy for the emerging Local Plan has been and will remain to accommodate as much development as possible in existing settlements and release Green Belt land only where there are exceptional circumstances for doing so. As referred to in previous reports, officers will seek to ensure the most efficient use of land on all sites and make the most of capacity in existing settlements.
14. To reinforce this strategy and as reported in July, the Council has completed the first phase of the SCS, as part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan. The study considers the potential to accommodate additional residential development in the settlements of Sevenoaks, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham, New Ash Green, Otford and Hartley.
15. The initial findings of the SCS have been discussed with relevant members and Development Management colleagues. At this stage and taking account of feedback received, the study suggests there is potential to accommodate up to 1,000 residential units across these settlements, over and above the five-year housing land supply.
16. The identified potential is considered to be compliant with national planning policies. The next phase will be to invite specific sites to come forward through the call for sites process and undertake further work on delivery and developability. The options for expressing the outcomes of the SCS in the updated Local Plan will be discussed with MHCLG and detailed in subsequent reports.

#### **Call for Sites**

17. Officers propose to undertake a two-stage call for sites process to inform the publication of an updated Regulation 18 version of the Local Plan, as set out in the LDS. The first stage (Stage 1) is due to commence in mid October and will seek to identify sites that are within existing settlements and not subject to significant planning constraints. The landowners identified through the SCS process will be contacted at this stage and invited to submit sites for consideration, should they wish to do so.
18. Following an assessment of the Stage 1 outcomes, an opportunity will be given for the submission of sites in all other areas of the District. These sites are likely to be subject to national policy constraints, such as Green Belt or an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This process, referred to as the Stage 2 call for sites, will take place during November. The call for sites will be discussed with MHCLG and any changes will be detailed in subsequent reports.
19. A question and answer sheet will be prepared for the Local Plan pages on the Council's website to address any specific queries about the evidence base

documents, including the SCS and the call for sites processes. Contact details for the planning policy team will be shared in this note.

### **Public Engagement**

20. Officers recognise the need to ensure that all stakeholders are fully informed on the approach to preparing an updated Local Plan and have an opportunity to submit comments. The engagement process will be undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

### **Next Steps**

21. The next steps in the plan making process are set out in an updated LDS, which is the subject of a separate report.

### **Emerging Trends**

22. Given the number of Local Plan specific items that are due for discussion at this meeting, this report does not contain the standing item of emerging trends that are likely to influence strategic planning in Sevenoaks District over the coming years. However, members may wish to select topics for discussion at the next meeting. Suggested topics are:
  - Equitable Transport: Can transport choices in Sevenoaks be more accessible for all?
  - The London Plan and how development pressures in outer London could impact on Sevenoaks District
  - Post-pandemic living and working trends
  - Tackling tenure and type: Housing needs in Sevenoaks District
  - White Paper or White Elephant - Whatever Next?

### **Key Implications**

#### Financial

The 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 the Local Plan are set out in the Local Development Scheme.

#### Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

### **Conclusion**

Officers will be happy to take any questions on the content of this report at the meeting.

**Appendices**

None

**Richard Morris**

**Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services**