

## Local Plan Update

Development and Conservation Advisory Committee - 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022

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

**Status:** For Decision

**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 Development and Conservation Advisory Committee

- a) Notes the content of the report.

### Background and Introduction

1. Members were updated on the Local Plan in December 2021, when Officers provided details of the emerging evidence base and the next steps to move the plan forwards, including discussions with what is now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This report sets out the latest position and focusses specifically on the up-coming stages of evidence base preparation, the outcome of the recent Call for Sites exercise and the next steps in the plan making process.

### Discussions with DLUHC

2. Officers remain committed to engaging with the Government on the production of its plan. The next meeting between SDC and DLUHC is expected to take place within the next 8 weeks.

### **Emerging evidence base**

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

#### Town Centre Strategy (TCS)

4. The TCS will be used to inform all aspects of emerging Local Plan policy on town centres, related to growth, uses and resilience. Officers have now received a draft version of the TCS from Allies and Morrison. This is currently being reviewed and the final version is expected in March.

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

5. The draft DWCS has also been received and is being reviewed. A briefing event for members is expected in March.

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

6. Emma Henshall gave a presentation on the TRLHN in December. The final report has now been completed and is available on the Council's website. The conclusions of the TRLHN will inform housing policies in the emerging Local Plan, particularly those related to affordable housing provision. The conclusions have also contributed to the Council's Housing Strategy.

#### Green Belt Study

7. Officers have commissioned Arup to undertake a stage 2 Green Belt assessment to complement work undertaken in 2017. The stage 2 report will provide a finer grain approach to assessing whether land parcels in close proximity to existing higher tier settlements and call for sites submissions meet the Green Belt purposes, as set out in national planning guidance. This work is expected to be completed by late spring.

### **Forthcoming evidence base and technical documents**

8. Officers are now moving on to the second phase of updating the Local Plan evidence. Invitations to tender have been issued for the following studies:

#### Employment Needs Study (ENS)

9. Officers are in the final stages of procuring consultants to update the Council's Economic Needs Study, the current version of which was prepared in 2016. This piece of work will forecast the amount of office and industrial floorspace required over the period of the Local Plan and consider emerging trends that are likely to be significant over the coming years. The study will consider issues such as the decentralisation of the London office market and the demand for flexible working environments to accommodate hybrid working patterns. It is hoped that the ENS will be commissioned by the end of February.

#### Strategic Transport Study

10. This piece of work will consider the effects of development proposed in the Local Plan on the Strategic Road Network, managed by National Highways (formally Highways England). It is likely that the assessment will use the recently completed Kent-wide transport model, which has been completed by environmental and engineering consultancy, Jacobs.

### Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

11. The SA is an essential technical study, which assesses and informs all aspects of the emerging plan. Invitations to tender have now been issued for the SA. It is expected that the appointed consultant will be in place by mid March at the latest.

### **Procurement of Legal Advice**

12. Officers will be appointing suitably experienced legal Counsel to advise on the statutory aspects of plan making. It is hoped that the preferred candidate will be in place within the next fortnight.

### **Call for Sites**

13. The call for sites exercise discussed at previous meetings closed on the 20<sup>th</sup> January. A total of 371 sites were received and officers are currently assessing all submissions to determine suitability, availability and achievability. Consideration will be given to factors such as the constraints affecting the site, views of the landowner and development potential. Further detail on the call for sites submissions will be provided at the meeting.

### **Vision**

14. Officers will be refreshing the strategic vision for the Local Plan, to reflect the Council's wider priorities, including 'net zero' and sustainable movement. It is hoped that an updated vision can reflect the social, economic and environmental implications of the global pandemic, focussing specifically on healthy communities. Officers will be engaging with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) at the beginning of March to discuss these issues.

### **Duty to Co-operate (DtC)**

15. DtC engagement has continued over recent months. A Portfolio Holder meeting was held with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council on 8<sup>th</sup> February and a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has now been signed with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. A joint West Kent DtC officer-level meeting was held on 21<sup>st</sup> February. Discussions with relevant authorities will continue on an on-going basis over the course of the plan making process.
16. Whilst the outcome of the call for sites is still to be assessed, officers consider it highly unlikely that all strategic needs can be met within existing settlements. Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify the release of Green Belt land, national planning guidance requires engagement with neighbouring authorities to determine if there is potential to accommodate needs outside of the District.

### **Next Steps**

17. Officers will continue with the preparation of emerging evidence base studies and the assessment of submissions from the call for sites, particularly those received at Stage 1 of the process - land within existing settlements. The emerging Regulation 18 document, which focusses on what the plan ought to contain, will give particular consideration to the spatial vision for Sevenoaks,

the Council's strategic priorities and how to make the best use of land outside of the Green Belt.

18. The approach to preparing the Local Plan will continue to be guided by the conclusions of evidence and other key components that contribute to the plan making process. Officers will continue to review progress and respond as this work emerges.

### **Emerging Trends**

19. A member presentation on Post Pandemic Living and Working Trends took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> February. Officers will advise on the next presentation at the meeting.

### **The Levelling Up White Paper**

20. The Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022. Whilst there is limited reference to the previous Secretary of State's headline planning reforms, it does acknowledge the digitisation of the planning system, with the aim of making the system quicker and more accessible to the public. An Infrastructure Levy is also mentioned, with the department continuing to look at ways to capture value from development.
21. Much of the White Paper focusses on housing matters and Local Government devolution. Significant unmet need for social housing and high private sector rents are identified as barriers to home ownership. A new task force is proposed to address regional inequalities associated with older person's housing, with the aim of increasing the choice and quality of accommodation. The publication of the Council's TRLHN means that we are well placed to identify and respond to these challenges.
22. A key transportation objective is that by 2030, transport links across the UK will be significantly closer to London standards. There remains uncertainty around how this and many of the objectives in the Levelling Up White Paper will be delivered and the extent to which the 2020 Planning White Paper will be taken forward.
23. Further commentary on the Levelling Up White Paper, including the potential for member training, will be provided at the meeting.

## **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.

### Net Zero Implications

Members are reminded of the Council's stated ambition to be Net Zero with regards to carbon emissions by 2030. The Local Plan is central to the delivery of Net Zero 2030. It will include policies to reduce the emissions of new development, support sustainable development, promote low carbon travel and support renewable energy alternatives in line with the adopted Net Zero 2030 Actions.

## **Conclusion**

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

<h3><b>Appendices</b></h3>
None

**Richard Morris**

Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services