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| 12 September 2017 | | ITEM: 6 |
| Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee | | |
| Thurrock Local Plan Progress Update | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Key | |
| Report of: Sean Nethercott, Acting Strategic Services Lead | | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Andy Millard, Assistant Director of Environment and Place | | |
| Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Corporate Director of Environment and Place | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

At its meeting on the 12th February 2014 Cabinet gave authorisation for the preparation of a new Local Plan to guide the future development of Thurrock. This report updates on the progress that has been to date and seeks the Committee's views on the approach being adopted by the Council in developing the Plan in an open and inclusive way.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Committee note the report and provide comment on the approach being adopted by the Council in preparing a new Local Plan.**
- 1.2 That the Committee continues to receive regular progress reports on the preparation of the Local Plan and provides oversight of the Plan making process.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** The Council has an adopted Local Plan in the shape of the Core Strategy and Policies for Management of Development DPD (December 2011). However, on the 12th February 2014 Cabinet gave approval to undertake a review of the Core Strategy and begin the preparation of a new Local Plan to guide the development of the Borough over the period to 2037.
- 2.2** A key principle underpinning the operation of the planning system is the requirement that local authorities must have an up-to-date Local Plan for their

area. The February 2014 Cabinet resolution recognised that a review of the Core Strategy was required in order to address the impact of economic change and a number of significant changes to the planning system at the national, regional and local levels. These include:

- The need for a more up-to-date statutory planning framework to coordinate the delivery of the Council's ambitious growth strategy for Thurrock;
- The revocation of the East of England Plan and the requirement for local planning authorities to undertake a fresh assessment of their future development needs;
- A requirement for the Council to identify a deliverable five year housing land supply and bring forward more sites for development to support long term economic growth;
- Legislative changes that fundamentally affect the form, content and process for preparing a Local Plan; and
- A need to plan for a decision by Government on the route and location of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing and its potential economic, transport, and environmental impact on the Borough.

2.3 The process for preparing and adopting Local Plans is set out in the Town and Country (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Any failure to comply with or follow the steps set out in legislation could lead to the plan being found unsound with the significant risk that the Government could step in and impose a new plan or development on the Borough.

2.4 Preparation of the Local Plan will must follow a number of stages to ensure that local people and stakeholders are fully engaged in the process and its content is based on robust evidence, the proper consideration and testing of alternative strategies and then finally external examination by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State. These stages of work are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1- Local Plan Stages of Preparation

- **Scoping Content and Evidence Development**
- **Issues and Options (Stage 1) – February 2016**
- **Issues and Options (Stage 2) – November 2017**
- **Draft Local Plan - May 2019**
- **Publication Draft Local Plan – May 2020**

- **Submission and Examination – From November 2020**
- **Adoption – September/October 2021**

2.5 It is anticipated that a Local Plan will be adopted by the Council in 2020/21, however, due to the complex nature of the work and the potential impacts of the Lower Thames Crossing decision-making process, the programme for preparing the plan will be kept under regular review.

Progress to Date

Issues and Options Stage 1 Public Consultation

- 2.6 The first Issues and Options Stage 1 Consultation Document (I&O1) was published in February 2016 and focused on thematic policy areas. As part of the formal plan-making process, the Council is required to consult the local community, business and stakeholders on the content of the Local Plan. On the 24 February 2016 the Council authorised a 6 week public consultation on the Thurrock Local Plan issues and Options (Stage 1) Document, the Thurrock Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and the Draft Thurrock Design Strategy.
- 2.7 The purpose of the consultation was to obtain the views of stakeholders, local businesses and the community on the key issues that the Local Plan will need to address in order to meet Thurrock's future development needs. By the close of the consultation period on 11 April 2015, a total of 70 organisations had responded with 548 separate comments having been received in response to the questions set out in the Consultation Document. A full record of the comments received and the Officers response to these representations is set out in the Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) Report of Consultation which is available to view on the Council's Local Plan website. (www.thurrock.gov.uk/localplan). A summary of the key issues raised by respondents is set out below

Issues and Options 1 – Key Consultation Responses

The Local Plan process must:

- Recognise that a failure to identify additional land for housing and employment development would threaten the future economic prosperity and growth of the Borough.
- Consider the development of a new spatial strategy which goes beyond the current approach of focusing investment and development within the existing urban area and the established Economic Growth Hubs in order to meet meets

Thurrock's future development needs.

- Undertake a full review of the Green Belt to identify additional land to meet future housing and employment needs consistent with the approach set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- Consider the allocation of land to meet the future housing needs of London and neighbouring South Essex authorities in addition to meeting Thurrock's own Objectively Assessed Housing Needs (OAHN) in full.
- Ensure that the Council actively engages with neighbouring authorities through the Duty to Cooperate process to meet London's future housing needs.
- Consider reviewing the Borough's retail hierarchy and the relative roles of Lakeside and Grays Town Centre in accommodating future strategic retail needs over the plan period.
- Establish a "town centres first" policy approach to the location of town centre uses with a policy to resist further out of centre retail development to support the retail led regeneration of Grays Town Centre.
- Plan positively for growth by supporting the transformation of Lakeside into a regional town centre with Intu Lakeside providing the best location for new retail and leisure development in the Borough for comparison retailing and leisure development.
- Ensure existing centres including Grays and Intu Lakeside can provide for future shopping needs of Thurrock. Further development outside these centres is not required and identified needs should be focused on maintaining and enhancing existing centres.
- Plan positively to maximise the economic benefits that will arise following the development of the proposed Lower Thames Crossing.
- Support the future commercial viability and expansion of the Ports through continued investment in new infrastructure, housing education and skills development.
- Identify additional sites for dedicated truck parks to meet future demand and reduce the environmental and transport impact of logistics related traffic growth on the Borough.
- Recognise the importance of protecting the role played by the River Thames in supporting economic growth.
- Allocate land for the development of new waste and renewable energy facilities which recognizes Thurrock's strategic location and the current availability of sites for new development.

- Recognise the importance and value of Thurrock's green infrastructure and heritage assets in supporting the delivery of wider economic, environmental, health, community and transport objectives.
- Support the delivery of the Thames Vision which promotes the retention of riverside industry and employment locations, and the protection and enhancement of the distinctive riverscape in terms of water quality, wildlife and attractiveness as an open space.
- Consider the impacts of any planned expansion or change to port facilities along the Thames within Thurrock on Medway's port infrastructure.
- Safeguard wharfs in Thurrock for the importation of marine dredged and other mineral resources into the region.
- Recognise Thurrock's future role in meeting London and the wider South East's waste needs.
- Consider the future implications of strategic transport improvements including the Lower Thames Crossing.
- Support the delivery of an enhanced public rights of way network accessible to all users –walkers, cyclist, equestrians and the disabled, including increased access to the Borough's open spaces.

2.8 The comments received by the Council in response to the Issues and Options Stage 1 Public Consultation have been used to inform the preparation of the Issues and Options Stage 2 Public Consultation Document which will be considered by Council at its meeting on 25th October 2017.

Issues and Options Stage 2 Public Consultation

2.9 The purpose of the Issues and Options (Stage 2) consultation will be to seek views on how Thurrock should develop and grow in the future and where in broad terms new development should be located across the borough. It is important to note that this consultation is not concerned about which sites should be allocated in the local plan for development. However, following this consultation, and based on the responses received, a preferred broad spatial strategy for accommodating Thurrock's future needs will be developed and this will strongly influence decisions about which sites should be developed.

2.10 The Issues and Options Stage 2 Public Consultation Document will seek the views of stakeholders and the local community on a range of issues including:

- The key challenges and objectives underpinning the development of the Local Plan;

- The future scale and distribution of new housing, employment, retail and leisure development needed in Thurrock over the plan period up to 2037;
- The range of broad alternative spatial options and approaches available to accommodate the Boroughs future housing needs;
- The opportunities available to improve the range and quality of sporting, leisure and recreational facilities, including public open space to meet Thurrock's future needs; and
- Call for Sites 3 – further request for landowners to submit sites for assessment and possible allocation for development through the plan-making process.

How are communities and key stakeholders going to be involved?

- 2.11 In preparing a new Local Plan the Council is required by legislation to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI sets out the actions which the Council must legally undertake to involve stakeholders and the community when preparing a new Local Plan. This includes making consultation documents available on the Council's website and in providing hard copies of the documentation at the Civic Offices in Grays and in libraries across the Borough.
- 2.12 As with the Issues and Options 1 Consultation in February 2016, the Council is keen to engage as many people as possible in the development of the Local Plan and will achieve this by building upon the basic legal requirements set out in the SCI through a wide range of consultation mechanisms and forums including but not limited to:
- Continuing engagement through the Local Plan Residents Forum, Youth Forum, Developer Forum and Business Forum.
 - Organising 'drop in' events via the 'Local Plan Roadshow' to allow people to come along and share their views in person.
 - Setting up online polls to allow more people to have their say on the big questions; and
 - 'Planning for Real' consultation events.
 - Duty to Cooperate Workshops
- 2.13 All the consultation responses received, together with a summary of how they have been considered and taken into account in preparing the Local Plan, will be recorded in the Thurrock Local Plan Consultation and Engagement Statement, which will be submitted to an Inspector for consideration as part of

the Local Plan Examination process. This document will be published alongside each stage of the plan-making process so that people can see how their views are helping to shape the development of the Local Plan.

What information will be used to inform the Local Plan?

2.14 Local Plans must be based on robust evidence about the economic, social and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area. Much of the evidence is of a technical nature and is not described in detail in this Report. Key pieces of evidence currently being prepared include:

- South Essex Housing Market Assessment 2016
- South Essex Housing Market Assessment Addendum Report 2017
- Thurrock Housing Land Availability Report
- Thurrock Development Capacity Study
- Thurrock Housing Opportunities Study
- Thurrock Green Belt Assessment
- South Essex Economic Development Needs Assessment
- Thurrock Employment Land Availability Assessment
- South Essex Retail Study
- Thurrock Active Place Study
- Thurrock Whole of Plan and CIL Viability Baseline Study
- Lakeside Area Development Framework Update
- Grays Town Centre Area Development Framework Update
- Thurrock Transport and Infrastructure Baseline Study
- Thurrock Vision for Movement

2.15 Further information on how some of the emerging studies and their findings and conclusions are already helping to shape the plan-making process will be set out in the Issues and Options Stage 2 Public Consultation Document. Copies of all the studies referred to above will be made available to view on the Councils Local Plan website following their completion. (www.thurrock.gov.uk/localplan).

How will the Local Plan relate to other Plans and Strategies for the area?

2.16 Partnership working and co-ordination of strategies are key features of the planning system. The Council is therefore liaising with relevant bodies who also prepare strategies which have an impact on the Borough. This includes those organisations involved in the delivery of health, education, transport and environmental services together with those companies involved in the provision of public utilities. This is to ensure that the plans and strategies of all these key delivery partners are consistent and in broad alignment with the emerging local plan strategy thereby ensuring the provision of necessary supporting infrastructure at the right time and in the right place to support Thurrock's future growth aspirations.

- 2.17 The Council is working jointly on strategic priorities with other authorities in South Essex, London and beyond. This is known as the Duty to Cooperate. Thurrock forms part of the South Essex Housing Market Area and as such the Local Authorities already work very closely together on planning for housing, economic, transport, flood risk and infrastructure delivery and growth. By virtue of its proximity to London and its strategic location next to the M25 and the Dartford Crossing, the wider geography for engaging through the Duty to Cooperate process also includes working with the London Mayors Office and the GLA, together with local authorities across Essex and North Kent on a range of Duty To Cooperate matters, including housing, transport and minerals and waste issues.
- 2.18 Through the ongoing development of the Local Plan evidence base and discussions with the various Duty to Co-operate bodies the Council has identified a series of key cross boundary issues which both the wider strategic plan-making process and the Thurrock Local Plan will need to consider and address. These are summarised below.

Key strategic Cross Boundary Issues

- Planning to meet future housing needs – the scale and distribution of development across South Essex
- Addressing the needs of Gypsies and Travelling people
- Planning for economic growth – the scale and distribution of development and required infrastructure improvements
- Managing the development of the strategic network of Centres – scale, distribution and phasing of growth
- Infrastructure planning and delivery – identification, funding and phasing of strategic and local infrastructure provision to support growth (transport, utilities, broadband, health, education, leisure and community infrastructure)
- Training, skills and accessibility to employment opportunities
- Maintaining the integrity of the Metropolitan Green Belt
- Strategic Green Infrastructure – management, maintenance and protection of strategic assets
- The River Thames
- Protecting and conserving the historic and natural environment
- Managing Flood Risk
- Climate Change
- Minerals and Waste – Thurrock’s future role in meeting local, regional and national needs
- Lower Thames Crossing
- Proposed Thames Tidal Barrier
- Cross Rail 2

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 As previously stated it is proposed to take a report to Council on the 25th October 2017 seeking authorisation to publish the Thurrock Local Plan Issues & Options Stage Consultation Document which will then be the subject of a 12 week public consultation event which will commence on 24th November 2017 and close on the 19th of February 2018. The consultation period has been deliberately extended beyond the normal 6 week period due to the impact of it falling either side of the Christmas and New Year break but more particularly to allow officers more time to engage with members of the public and stakeholders on some of the key issues arising out of the plan-making process. Reflecting this approach Members of the Committee are asked to comment on the proposed approach to public consultation identified in this Report and to suggest amendments or alternative approaches for consideration.
- 3.2 The scope, nature and wording of the questions for consultation will be finalised in October, leading to the production of a range of consultation papers, including summary non-technical documents, to help generate interest in the Local Plan process and obtain comments and views back from all sections of the community. These documents will then be submitted to Council on 25th October together with a report seeking approval to publish them for consultation for a 12 week period.
- 3.3 In view of the complexity of the issues being considered as part of the Issues and Options Stage 2 Consultation and the often highly technical nature of the local plan evidence base, it is proposed to run a series of Members Workshops for each of the Groups in September and October in the run up to Council in order to brief Members and to obtain their views on the key issues and options under consideration.
- 3.4 Following the conclusion of the consultation period all responses will be logged and reported back to Council as a precursor to the preparation of a full Draft Local Plan which again will be subject to further public consultation.
- 3.5 As the plan-making process develops it is proposed to bring further reports back to this Committee highlighting progress made and seeking the comments and views of Members on key issues as they arise.
- 3.6 The major costs associated with the preparation of the Local Plan will be incurred during the financial years 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21. The costs of preparing the Local Plan will be met from existing budgets and from income derived from planning application submissions, in line with the programme of activity set out in the approved Local Development Scheme.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is requested to provide its views on the approach being adopted to prepare the Local Plan, in order to comply with the requirements

set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Localism Act 2011 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The Local Plan will be the subject of extensive public consultation at each stage of the plan-making process in accordance with the approach and practice set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) adopted by the Council in November 2016.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 This report sets out how the preparation of the Local Plan will be undertaken in a manner consistent with wider corporate objectives. The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality of opportunity in the provision of services and employment opportunities. A Community Equality Impact Analysis (CEqIA) will be conducted as part of the process of preparing the new Local Plan. Compliance with the SCI will ensure that the consultation process associated with the new Local Plan will provide an opportunity for all sections of the community, including those with protected characteristics, to become fully involved in helping to shape the future planning and development of Thurrock.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Management Accountant

The major costs associated with the preparation of the Local Plan will be incurred during the financial years 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21. The costs of preparing the Local Plan will be met from existing budgets and from income derived from planning application submissions, in line with the programme of activity set out in the approved Local Development Scheme.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Vivien Williams**
Planning & Regeneration Solicitor

Set out in the body of the report.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

This report sets out how the preparation of the Local Plan will be undertaken in a manner consistent with wider corporate objectives. The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality of opportunity in the provision of services and employment opportunities. A Community Equality Impact Analysis (CEqIA) will be conducted as part of the process of preparing the new Local Plan. Compliance with the SCI will ensure that the consultation process associated with the new Local Plan will provide an opportunity for all sections of the community, including those with protected characteristics, to become fully involved in helping to shape the future planning and development of Thurrock.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

There are no other implications associated with the report

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

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