

8 March 2021
Local Development Plan Task Force
Thurrock Local Plan – Next Steps
This report is Public

Executive Summary

This report summarises the steps that the Council proposes to take to prepare a sound Local Plan in accordance with all relevant legal and procedural requirements and consistent with national policy. It provides an update to the previous Thurrock Local Plan - Next Steps Report which the Task Force considered at its meeting on 16th July 2020.

1. Introduction and Background.

- 1.1 Following the Taskforce meeting in July 2020 when the last update was provided, work has continued in preparing the new Local Plan for Thurrock (the 'Thurrock Plan') against the background of the Covid-19 Pandemic and a series of ongoing local and national lockdowns. This has required the Council to develop new ways of working with stakeholders and the local community in producing the Plan. Despite some early disruption to the plan-making process, significant progress has been made in moving forward with the Plan over the intervening months, as the move towards a greater use of virtual communication platforms has facilitated effective joint working with scheme promoters, landowners and developers as time has gone on.
- 1.2 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic will have significant and potentially long lasting economic, social and environmental impacts all of which could have profound impacts on how we live, work and travel in the future. Notwithstanding the inherent difficulties this poses for the plan-making process terms of in trying to predict what this all means in relation to the demand for and use of land and infrastructure, the Government still requires that all local authorities to have an adopted Local Plan in place by December 2023.
- 1.3 A further notable event in 2020 which will have an impact on the plan-making process in any part of the country (not just Thurrock), was the publication on 6th August 2020 of the Planning White Paper – *Planning for the Future*. This sets out a wide range of radical proposals for transforming the planning system and the heart of the Governments proposed reforms are a number of major changes to not only the way in which plans are prepared but also in respect of the nature and content of Plans. Although consultation on the White Paper closed on 31st

October 2020, the Government has yet to formally respond on how it intends to take forward the proposed reforms or the timescales for their implementation.

- 1.4 The recent announcement of further delays to the Lower Thames Crossing Development Consent Order (DCO) process will only serve to further prolong the uncertainty over its impact on the Plan process, including the potential need for the plan to accommodate future changes in its route and design which could impact on the availability of sites for development and the timing of their delivery.
- 1.5 However, while all these factors represent challenges in their own right, proactive steps are being taken to help reduce or minimise their potential long term impact on the plan-making process. This includes the further development of innovative approaches to collaborative working using digital platforms; ongoing dialogue with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to gain a better understanding of the nature and timing of any changes to the plan-making process; enhanced project management capabilities; and the development of a Local Plan spatial strategy which is not reliant on the delivery of housing and employment uses along the axis of the LTC in the early years of the Local Plan.

2 Thurrock Plan – current position and next steps

Publication of a new Local Development Scheme (LDS)

- 2.1 In February 2021, the Council published an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) which sets out revised timescales for the production of our Plan. Based on the timetable set out in the LDS, the key milestones in preparing the Thurrock Plan are as follows:
 - Consultation on a draft Regulation 18 Local Plan – Quarter 2 2022
 - Consultation on a draft Regulation 19 Local Plan – Quarter 4 2022
 - Submission of Local Plan - Quarter 2 2023
- 2.2 Further work is now being undertaken to develop a more detailed project plan to underpin the production of the Plan. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) is supporting the Council with the project plan and is reviewing the timetable, and resources available to deliver the plan as a 'critical friend'. Members will be updated on this work at the next Taskforce meeting.

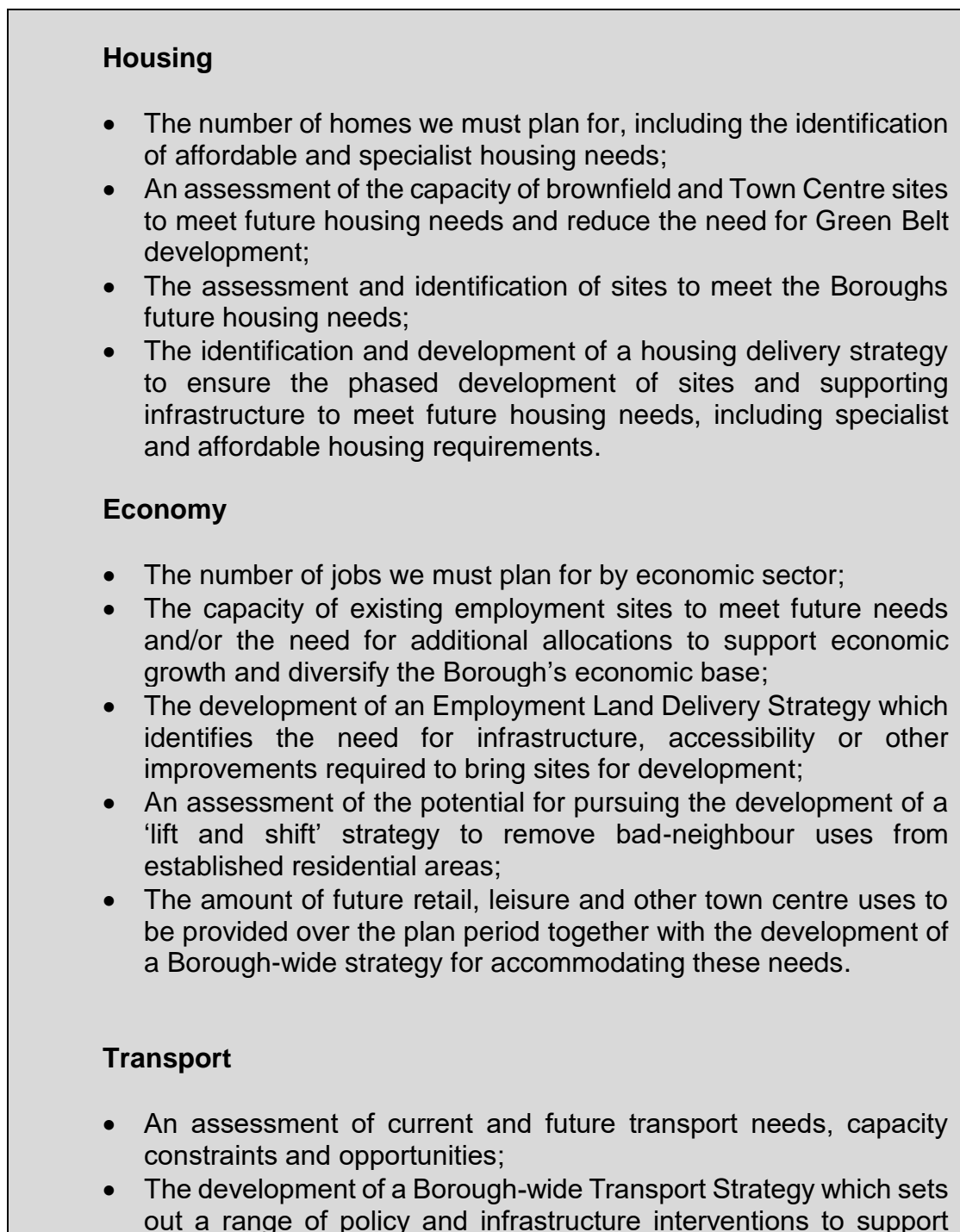
Local Plan Work Programme and Key Deliverables

- 2.3 The draft Project Plan for the production of the Plan sets out a programme for the commissioning and procurement of a significant number of new technical studies over the next 12 months, together with work starting on the production of the plan itself. The key technical studies and the information that they will provide to inform the plan-making process are set out in presentation slides

“2021 - The Year of the Local Plan” which is included as Appendix 1 to this Report.

- 2.4 In summary, by March 2022 the Council will be in a position to understand and articulate the scale and spatial distribution of its future development needs with regard to the following considerations set out in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Key Local Plan Deliverables 2021



growth, and meet the Council's other key policy priorities in respect of Climate Change, Air Quality and Health and Well-Being;

- The ongoing development of costed proposals to support the future development of the Boroughs strategic growth areas and the promotion of sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling and rail freight as a means of reducing car use and freight movements by road;
- The development of a range of transport models to test the effectiveness of a range of transport interventions in terms of capacity, safety and air quality considerations.

Community Infrastructure

- The identification of current and future community infrastructure needs, deficiencies and opportunities at a Borough-wide and Ward based level;
- The production of place - based Infrastructure Delivery Plans for each strategic growth location which identifies the required Community, Transport, Utilities, Green and Blue infrastructure, together with proposed funding and delivery mechanisms;
- The production of a Borough-wide Infrastructure Delivery Plan underpinned by funding agreements with key delivery partners, including Government, infrastructure providers and service providers, and land owners and developers;
- A CIL Charging Schedule which sets out a strategy and priorities for delivery to be funded by landowners and developer through the capture of a CIL.

Environment

- A full and transparent assessment of the environmental, sustainability and health impacts of the emerging development plan (policies and proposals);
- The identification of required mitigation strategies and proposals to address the impacts of the Plan on a range of key environmental considerations including, Climate Change, Flood Risk, Energy, Water resources, Landscape and Green Belt, Air Quality and, Health and Well-Being.

Place

- Place based Regeneration and Development Strategies for key growth locations across the Borough;
- Inset Plans for Strategic Growth Areas;
- Area Development Frameworks and Master Plans;
- A new Borough-wide Design Strategy and supporting Design Guides and Codes

- 2.5 It should be noted that progress on completing the work streams identified above will be largely dependent on the availability of resources and the ability of the Council to manage and mitigate the impact of outside influences on the plan-making process. These include Covid-19, Government Policy, Local Government reorganisation, the Lower Thames Crossing and the availability of scarce technical and professional resources.

Member Engagement

- 2.6 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 Thurrock Plan and provide an opportunity for all Members to engage fully with the process. It is therefore proposed to bring the Member Engagement Strategy to the next meeting of the Taskforce for review and comment. Although, the detailed staging of activities has yet to be worked up, it is envisaged that the programme for engaging with Members should be integrated and be delivered at the following levels:
- Leaders Group
 - All Member Briefings – Evidence and Strategy Development
 - Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny
 - Local Development Plan Taskforce
- 2.7 It is hoped that by adopting a front-loading approach towards engaging 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.
- 2.8 The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on Plan-making has been updated setting out how local authorities can review and update their Statements of Community Involvement (SCI) to reflect the difficulties involved in consulting with stakeholders and the local community in a Covid-19 world. The PPG states that where *“any of the policies in the Statement of Community Involvement cannot be complied with due to current guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), the local planning authority is encouraged to undertake an immediate review and update the policies where necessary so that plan-making can continue.”* The PPG states that any temporary amendments should promote effective community engagement *“by means which are reasonably practicable”*. Various online engagement methods are suggested, including virtual exhibitions, digital consultations, video conferencing, social media, whilst requirements for physical documents to be publicly available for inspection, may be satisfied through online publication. To ensure accessibility for those without internet access, authorities are advised to consider engaging directly with representative groups, focusing on those in areas specifically affected by proposals, whilst allowing individuals to nominate others to represent their views on their behalf. It also suggests that

representations may be made by telephone or in writing where alternatives cannot be identified.

- 2.9 In order that the Council's approach to Community Engagement complies with Government Guidance, it is proposed to review the Local Plan Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and to identify any necessary amendments which are required to ensure that the process of community engagement can be undertaken in a safe and effective manner. A further report on the matter will be submitted to the Taskforce for consideration in due course once more is known about the efficacy of the Governments vaccination programme and any changes in national policy which might arise from this through any future revisions to the PPG.

Thurrock Design Charrettes – Progress Update

- 2.10 The roll out of the Thurrock Design Charrette process commenced in December 2020 with the launch of an online Consultation Portal. This was quickly followed by a series of 8 Design Charrette Workshops across the Borough involving landowners, scheme promoters and developers who are currently promoting sites for allocation through the Local Plan. A note summarising progress on the Charrette process to date is attached as Appendix 2 to this paper.
- 2.11 The Design Charrette workshops have been very well attended and have been invaluable in deepening and developing a shared understanding of the issues and opportunities associated in taking for the future development of 8 areas under consideration (Bulphan, Chadwell St Mary, Corringham, East Tilbury, Horndon on the Hill, South Ockendon, Orsett and Stanford-le-Hope).
- 2.12 The information obtained from these discussions will now be used to help inform the wider plan-making process including the nature and scope of the evidence needed to support the production of the Local Plan. The information generated will also be used to help inform the Community Design Charrette Workshops which will now be held in early summer 2021. Further progress reports on the roll out of the Design Charrette process will be provided to the Taskforce over the course of the year as work progresses over the summer and into the autumn.
- 2.13 Following the conclusion of the public consultation process work will then begin on the production of a series of reports and Development Frameworks which will establish a vision and guiding principles to steer the future development of the Charrette areas. It is intended that the place based Development Frameworks will sit alongside the formal Local Plan assessment of individual sites and their suitability for allocation in the Plan, with both processes being combined to produce a Housing Supply Topic Paper which will give an early indication of how the scale and distribution of Thurrock's future housing needs will be met.
- 2.14 It is proposed to bring the Draft Housing Supply Topic Paper to Members in

autumn 2021 and to then publish the Topic Paper in early 2022 as part of the emerging Local Plan evidence base in order to both solicit feedback from the public and stakeholders, but also to assist in giving further confidence to landowners, scheme promoters, delivery partners and Government on the direction and progress being made in preparing the Thurrock Plan

- 2.15 The emerging Local Plan also has a significant role to play in delivering a wide range of Council priorities and its production will be informed by on-going work in preparing or updating a number of other Corporate Strategies. These include updates to the Councils Economic, Housing and Health and Well-being Strategies, as well as the preparation of 'new' strategies in relation to Climate Change, Energy and Design. Of major importance to the Local Plan process is the need to prepare a new Thurrock Transport Strategy (TTS) which fully supports the delivery of the Local Plan as well as the Council's wider transport, economic, health and environmental objectives. A further report setting out progress in preparing the Transport Strategy is also included on the Agenda for this evenings Taskforce Meeting.
- 2.16 In view of the significant inter-relationships that exist between the strategies highlighted above, consideration will be given as to whether there is merit in co-consulting on their development in parallel with the continued roll out of the Thurrock Design Charrette process during summer 2021. The benefits of merging or aligning any future engagement processes would greatly assist the Community in influencing the wider place-making process as well as making effective and efficient use of the Design Charrette public consultation infrastructure.
- 2.17 Alongside the statutory plan-making process, the Council will also seek to further develop and strengthen its relationships with Government and in particular with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the Department for Transport (DfT), the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), together with key delivery partners such as Homes England (HE), Highways England (HE) and the Environment Agency (EA) to ensure that the delivery of the Local Plan is not compromised by a lack of funding for the delivery of strategic infrastructure interventions required to support the Councils growth aspirations and meet community needs.

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Place

Appendices to the report

Appendix 1 “2021 - The Year of the Local Plan” Slide Pack

Appendix 2 Design Charrettes - Thurrock Members Briefing Note