

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 24 February 2016 | | ITEM: 14 |
| Council | | |
| Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) and Design Strategy Consultations | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Key | |
| Report of: Councillor Speight, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration | | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Andy Millard, Head of Planning and Growth | | |
| Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning and Transportation | | |
| This report is Public | | |

Executive Summary

The meeting held on the 12 February 2014, the Cabinet gave authorisation for the preparation of a new Local Plan to guide the future development of Thurrock.

The preparation and publication of the Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) Consultation represents the first key stage in the plan-making process and provides the local community and stakeholders with their first opportunity to help shape the future development of the Borough.

The Consultation Document sets out a series of high level questions designed to start a conversation with the public in order to identify the key issues affecting the Borough which the Local Plan will need to consider and address during the course of its development.

Alongside the Issues and Options (Stage 1) Consultation Document it is also proposed to publish the draft Thurrock Design Strategy for public consultation. The Design Strategy is intended to promote higher standards of design in Thurrock and provide detailed guidance to developers and landowners on how to achieve attractive and well-designed schemes.

Consultation on both documents will run for a six week period beginning on Friday 26 February and closing on Monday 11 April 2016.

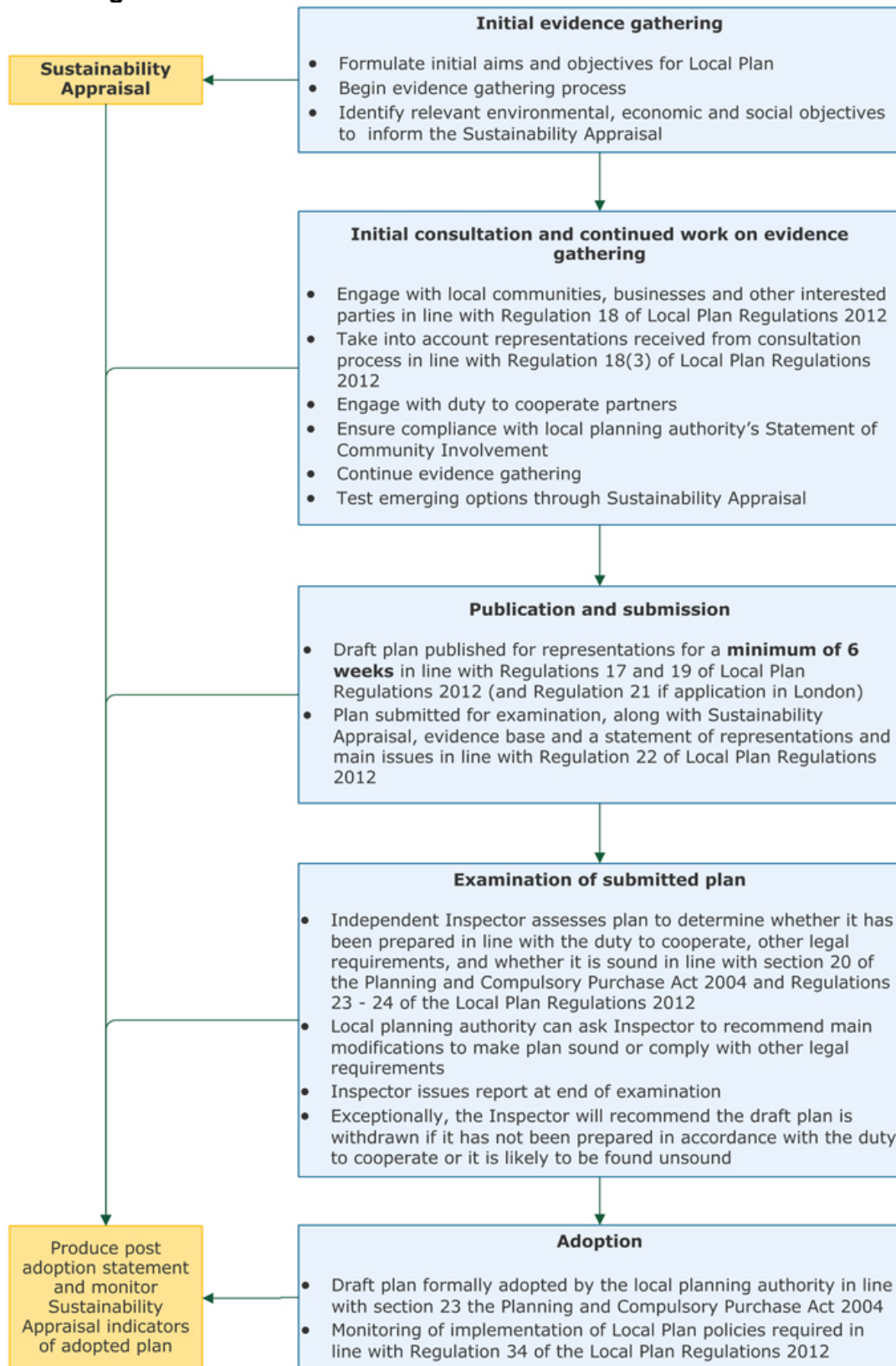
1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The Council authorise public consultation on both the Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) Consultation Document and the Thurrock Local Plan Design Strategy Document.**

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 12 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 2035.
- 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 to 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;
 - 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. An over view of the plan-making process is set out in Figure 1. Any failure to comply with or follow the steps set out in Figure 1 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.

Figure 1 Local Plan Process



Local Development Scheme (LDS)

- 2.4 Local Authorities are required to set out in a project plan the timetable for the production of a Local Plan. This document known as the Local Development Scheme (LDS) identifies the stages that have to be completed before the Local Plan can be submitted to the Secretary of State and then adopted by the Council following an Examination in Public.
- 2.5 The Council's current Local Development Scheme was approved by Cabinet at the meeting on 9 December 2015. Key dates in the plan-making process are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 – Local Plan Timetable

| Consultation Stage | Anticipated Date |
|--|--|
| Local Plan (2015-2035) | |
| Issues and Options – Stage 1 (Strategic Policies) | February/March 2016 |
| Issues and Options – Stage 2 (Spatial Options and Sites) | October/November 2016 |
| Draft Local Plan | October/November 2017 |
| Publication Draft of the Local Plan | October/November 2018 |
| Submission to the Secretary of State | March 2019 |
| <i>Examination in Public (Hearings)</i> | <i>April 2019 – September 2020 (October/November 2019)</i> |
| <i>Adoption</i> | <i>October 2020</i> |
| Supplementary Planning Documents | |
| Design Strategy - Draft | February/March 2016 |
| Design Strategy - Adoption | September 2016 |
| Design Strategy Technical Annex - Draft | June 2016 |
| Design Strategy Technical Annex - Adoption | December 2016 |
| Planning Obligations - Draft | October/November 2016 |
| Planning Obligations - Adoption | March 2017 |
| Interim Guidance Note | |
| Affordable Housing – Off Site Contributions | March 2016 |

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

- 2.6 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 activities the Council must legally undertake when preparing a plan along with setting out what the Council will do to engage the local community and stakeholders in helping to shape the future development of Thurrock.
- 2.7 Following public consultation earlier this year, the Council approved the adoption of a new SCI at the meeting on the 25 November 2015.
- 2.8 To supplement the SCI the Council has prepared a Local Plan Engagement Strategy (Phase 1) which builds upon the basic requirements set out in the SCI and provides additional detail about the activities the Council are intending to undertake to involve the public in the plan-making process which go beyond the legal requirements. This reflects the fact that different consultation approaches will need to be evolved to meet the needs of different stakeholders and sections of the community, including harder to reach groups. The Local Plan Engagement Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2015.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

Thurrock Local Plan Issues & Options (Stage) 1 Consultation Document

- 3.1 This report seeks the Council's approval to publish the Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) Consultation Document for public consultation over a six week period commencing on Friday 29 February and concluding on Monday 11 April.
- 3.2 The purpose of the Consultation Document is to obtain the views of the local community, businesses and stakeholders on the key issues that the Local Plan will need to address in order to meet the Borough's future development needs and in protecting and enhancing the built and natural environments. In order to begin a conversation with the wider community on the major issues facing Thurrock the Consultation Document sets out a series of simple high level questions on some of the key issues the public might wish to consider and comment on.
- 3.3 The Consultation Document sets out an initial list of the key strategic cross-boundary planning issues which the Council will need to consider through the Duty To Cooperate with neighbouring Local Authorities and prescribed bodies such as Highways England, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, the Port of London Authority and Network Rail. Consultees will be asked to consider the list of issues identified by the Council and advice on the appropriateness and scope of the matters which need to be considered under the Duty To Cooperate.

- 3.4 In addition it is intended to produce a range of supporting documents, 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 together with the main Consultation Document will be made available on the Council's website and in hard copy at various locations across the Borough.
- 3.5 Following the conclusion of the consultation period all responses will be logged and reported back to Members as a precursor to the Issues and Options (Stage 2) Consultation which will be held in late 2016. At that stage of the process the public will be consulted on a range of policy and development options which will be based on the responses to the stage 1 consultation and the emerging findings from the development of the Local Plan evidence base.

Thurrock Local Plan Design Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

- 3.6 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are produced to provide additional detail and guidance to support policies and proposals in an adopted development plan. Although they do not have the same weight or status as policies in a Local Plan as they are not subject to an independent examination before an Inspector they can still form a 'material consideration' in determining planning applications once they have been adopted by the Council following public consultation.
- 3.7 The importance of achieving good design and the benefits this can bring in delivering sustainable communities, is clearly set out in National Planning Policy and Guidance. In preparing the Design Strategy the Council is committed to substantially raising design standards across the Borough and the delivery of the following six objectives:
1. Improve the overall design quality standards of development in Thurrock, enhancing perceptions of place and reinforcing a strong sense of civic pride
 2. Innovate through design improvements in locations where the existing built environment requires regeneration
 3. Enhance the best of the existing built and natural environments drawing on the heritage and identity of towns and villages in Thurrock
 4. Provide clear guidance on the Council's expectations regarding the design approach to be adopted in Thurrock
 5. Work proactively with the development industry to bring forward proposals in a timely and effective way having regard to statutory policy requirements
 6. Lead by example through the design and implementation of Council-led development projects

- 3.8 The overarching objectives described above will be implemented through the application of the Design Strategy to all projects coming forward within Thurrock where the Council will work closely with developers and landowners to secure the delivery of high quality development across the Borough. The Design Strategy sets out a toolkit of guidance that the Council will use when assessing proposals through the Development Management process. Where proposals do not reflect the guidance and are contrary to national policy they will be considered for refusal.
- 3.9 It is proposed to publish the Design Strategy SPD for public consultation alongside the Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation Document. Following the six week consultation period the Council will consider any comments received on the draft SPD and amend the document should it be required. The final draft SPD together with a Report of Consultation will then be submitted back to full Council for consideration and adoption.

Consultation Arrangements

- 3.10 The two consultations will be the subject to a six week consultation period commencing on Friday 26 February 2016 and running through to a close on Monday 11 April 2016. The consultation process will be taken forward in accordance with the approach set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and the Local Plan Engagement Strategy.
- 3.11 It is proposed to undertake a variety of different consultation approaches to ensure that all sections of the community have a full and proper opportunity to become involved in shaping the future direction of their Borough.
- 3.12 In addition to the opportunities for direct contact with the local community, it is also proposed to use digital platforms as well as both the printed and social media to advertise the consultation process, to encourage the public and stakeholders to become actively engaged in the plan-making process and to have their say on the future of the Borough. In recognition that not everyone has access to the internet all the relevant consultation documentation and materials will also be made available at a variety of accessible locations around the Borough over the 6 week period.
- 3.13 The major costs associated with the preparation of the Local Plan will be incurred during the financial year 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18, and 2018/19. The costs of preparing the Local Plan will be met from existing budgets and their re-allocation in line with the programme of activity set out in the approved Local Development Scheme. This includes the on-going budget for preparing the Local Plan and a separately identified ear-marked reserve held on the Council's balance sheet.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The preparation and adoption of a new Local Plan is required to ensure that the significant progress being made in securing future growth and

regeneration of the Borough is not stalled by the lack of an up-to-date development plan. This is particularly important given that national planning policy guidance states that where the development plan is out-of-date, permission for development should be granted unless any adverse impacts would outweigh the benefits of doing so. The implications of this point are clear; if an authority fails to plan properly for its own area, then the opportunity to do so will be lost through planning appeals determined by Planning Inspectors or by the Secretary of State.

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

- 5.1 A report setting out progress on preparing the Local Plan was considered and approved by the Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on the 20 January 2016.
- 5.2 The Thurrock 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 2015 and the Local Plan Engagement Strategy approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2015.

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

- 6.1 This report sets out how the preparation of 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. An Equality Impact Analysis (EqIA) will be conducted as part of the process of preparing the new Local Plan. The approach to consultation set out in the newly adopted SCI will ensure that the consultation process associated with the new Local Plan will provide an opportunity for all sections of the community, including harder to reach groups, to become fully involved in helping to shape the future planning and development of Thurrock.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Carl Tomlinson**
Finance Manager

Preparation of the Local Plan will be funded through a combination of existing revenue budgets within Planning and Growth and an ear-marked reserve held for this purpose.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by **Vivien Williams**
Planning and Regeneration Solicitor

Set out in the body of the report

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

Set out in the body of the report

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):

- Thurrock Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) November 2015
- Thurrock Local Plan Engagement Strategy (Phase 1) November 2015
- Thurrock Local Development Scheme (LDS) December 2015

9. Appendices to the report

Appendix 1: Local Plan Issues and Options (Stage 1) Consultation Document
Appendix 2: Local Plan Design Strategy SPD (Draft) Consultation Document

Report Author:

Sean Nethercott
Growth and Strategy Team Manager
Planning and Transportation