

LOCAL PLAN REVIEW WORKING GROUP

NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 1 NOVEMBER 2023

Present:

Councillor Stephen Pickering (Chair) (in the Chair)

Councillor Caroline Smith
Councillor Stephen Clough
Councillor Michael Durrant
Councillor Lee Hartshorne
Councillor Heather Liggett

Councillor Frank Adlington-Stringer
Councillor Andrew Cooper
Councillor David Hancock
Councillor Tony Lacey
Councillor Mick Smith

Also Present:

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| D Thompson | Assistant Director of Planning |
| H Fairfax | Planning Policy & Environment Manager |
| A Maher | Governance Manager |
| A Bond | Governance Officer |

LPR/ Apologies for Absence

1/23-

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Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Suzy Cornwell and Stuart Fawcett.

LPR/ The Purpose of the Review Group

2/23-

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Members of the Group introduced themselves before viewing a presentation by The Assistant Director Planning and the Planning Policy & Environment Manager. The presentation outlined the Terms of Reference and the purpose of the Local Plan Review Working Group.

Councillor S Pickering explained that the aim had been to ensure that all political groups across the Council had involvement with the Group and would be able to influence the work that it conducted. He stressed that the process would not be rushed and that it would be both constructive and collaborative.

LPR/ Discussions Based on the Attached Papers

3/23-

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Group were presented with a report which outlined the issues and alternatives relating to a review of the Local Plan, the effectiveness of policies in the Adopted Local Plan and the outcome of a desk top review of the Local Plan.

Members heard that although the Council's Local Plan was adopted two years ago, it had been submitted for examination in May 2018 and had been prepared in line with the provisions of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Since that time, the NPPF has had numerous changes including the introduction of the national design guide, the standard method for calculating local housing need and an increased emphasis on climate

change.

Officers had undertaken a desk top review of the Local Plan, which utilised the PAS assessment tool to identify if an early update of the Local Plan was likely to be necessary. The review suggested that the local plan was working well overall with the exception of a couple of areas of concern.

Group were also informed that new regulations, policy and guidance necessary for the preparation of the first new style of local plans would be in place by Autumn 2024. Plans would need to be submitted for examination by 30 June 2025. This would leave Council 20 months to secure the relevant evidence, prepare documentation and undertake the necessary consultation.

Members discussed the report at length. They considered the interim findings of the review and the RAG rating associated with each of the monitoring indicators: Green, to indicate that the relevant policies were being implemented effectively. Amber to indicate that there were some issues but these were being managed, and Red to highlight any serious issues.

Working Group discussed whether it would be best to begin work on a new local plan or to focus on a partial update of the current plan.

Councillor H Liggett raised concerns with regard to overloaded sewer systems and Group agreed to consider how best to address this issue as the work of the Group progressed.

Members discussed Neighbourhood Plans and if it would be beneficial for these to be updated at the same time as the Local Plan. They heard that these could be produced at any time and would depend on the needs of each individual Parish.

Group discussed the timeframe of a new Local Plan and heard the current Government proposals were that 'new style Local Plans' should not take more than 30 months to complete.

Group were reminded that the Local Plan must be reviewed every five years, in accordance with current national planning policy.

Members considered that evidence should be gathered so that Group could take an informed decision on how to proceed once there was clarity around the 'new style' plan making system.

LPR/ Next Steps

**4/23-
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Group discussed the next steps and considered the merits of progressing to a formal review under the current system. Officers advised Members that given the likely scope of the review (including the strategic matters of housing and employment land and the need to reflect the Environment Act 2021 biodiversity requirements), a partial review would likely take a similar length of time to a full review, due to the impact on the strategic policies of the current Local Plan.

Officers advised that, in light of the above discussion, there would not be sufficient time to complete a full review by June 2025 and that there was a risk of abortive work/having to re-do stages of the process if a formal review was commenced before the anticipated changes to the Plan process were introduced later in 2024. This assessment had been corroborated by an experienced planning professional who represented the Planning Officers Society Enterprise, who advise Local Planning Authorities on matters such as Local Plan preparation and reviews.

Officers also advised that the first substantive stage of a formal review would be evidence gathering in any case. The recommendation to progress with updating the evidence that would underpin an updated Plan/future Local Plan would address this requirement. The only difference from a formal Regulation 18 stage would be setting specific timeframes for public consultation.

Members were reminded that the Government consulted on the proposed 30 month system at the end of 2023 and the suggested process (to which officers provided a written response) would introduce a new 'gateway' system with associated consultation periods.

The Working Group heard that rather than duplicate consultation exercises, officers considered it prudent to issue a statement informing members of the public about the evidence gathering process that would be commencing in 2024 and explain the reasons for waiting for certainty on the 'new style' system before undertaking formal consultation.

At the conclusion of the discussion Members agreed –

1. To proceed with evidence gathering in advance of certainty regarding national requirements.
2. To prepare a statement that explains that a formal review is not going to commence until we have that certainty but that we have commenced evidence gathering.

LPR/ Date and Time of Next Meeting

**5/23-
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Members agreed that the next meeting of the Local Plan Review Working Group would take place in January 2024.