

Draft Terms of Reference and Scope of the Member Local Plan Review Working Group

1. Purpose of the Group.

The role of the Working Group is to support officers in meeting the timetable for the preparation of a new Local Plan, receiving regular updates on progress and overseeing delivery and any changes that may be required to the work programme. Officer advice will be based on how the locally gathered evidence affects that strategic direction, which must be cognisant of national policy, to deliver a Plan that has a reasonable prospect of adoption following Examination in Public. There will be occasions where external advice will be sought by officers on these matters and such advice will be reported to the Working Group.

2. Commitment of individual Members.

Each Member of the Working Group commits to the following:

- That they are committed to the production and submission of the new NEDDC Local Plan by December 2026 and will at all times work towards this goal.
- That they will work constructively as part of the Group to make decisions in relation to the new Local Plan.
- That they will work collaboratively to make these decisions in an efficient and timely manner and in accordance with the timetable for the production of the new Local Plan by the Government's deadline of December 2026.
- To do everything reasonably possible to ensure that the timetable for the production of the new Local Plan is met.

3. Composition and Conduct of the Working Group.

a) The Working Group will comprise of 9 Members, split across the political groupings as follows:

- Labour – 5
- Conservative – 2
- Independent – 1
- Lib Dem – 1

b) Members of the Working Group are expected to comply with the Terms of Reference.

c) The meeting will be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Place or in their absence the Chair of the Environment Scrutiny Committee;

d) The Working Group has no decision making powers but its recommendations (albeit of a majority) will be reported directly to Cabinet, Council or the relevant Committee;

e) If a majority decision cannot be reached on any particular issue, this will be reported to Cabinet, where a decision on that issue will be made;

f) Decisions will be made by the Working Group by consensus. Where this is not possible a formal vote will be taken.

g) The Working Group should allow full participation from other Members – regular reports to Environment Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and an annual update to Council.

4. Terms of Reference.

The terms of reference of the group are to:

- Oversee the process for reviewing the Local Plan and the progress made on individual work streams;
- Provide the core officer team (Assistant Director Planning, Planning Policy and Environment Manager, Development Manager and members of those teams) with a Member perspective on issues raised;
- Ensure integration/complementarity of the vision, objectives and policies of the Local Plan with those of the Council Plan and any relevant adopted policies;
- Give Members' perspective on other key decisions on matters relating to Local Plan production including: resources, scope of documents, evidence base, identification of alternative development options, content of the local development scheme, sustainability appraisal/appropriate assessment, and consultation methods;
- Provide a critical friend role to advise Council on the content of the Local Plan.

The officer advice presented to and discussed by the Working Group will from time to time have the benefit of external and independent expert advice, which will provide a 'sense check' on the overall direction of travel being proposed.

5. Need for an updated/new Local Plan.

The current Local Plan was adopted in November 2021. The Government requires local planning authorities to review Local Plans at least once every 5 years from their adoption date and update them as necessary, to ensure that policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community¹.

Since the formation of the Working Group at Council in September 2023, there has been a General Election and the current government have recently concluded a consultation on changes to national planning policy. The consultation proposes fundamental changes to the housing target of this (any many other) districts via a revision to the standard method for calculating housing need, with no transition arrangements to the new system. The consultation has also extended the deadline for the submission of new/updated Local Plans under the current system to the Planning Inspectorate to December 2026. This combination of factors means that the current Local Plan will become out of date on the launch of a revised National Planning Policy Framework, assuming that it is in line with the consultation version.

There is therefore a need to work with urgency towards a new Local Plan and have this ready for submission to the Planning Inspectorate by the December 2026 deadline. The government has indicated that any Plans that are not submitted by that deadline will be assessed under the plan making system outlined in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which will be a 30 month programme. The consequences of not meeting the 2026 deadline are the risk of abortive work and an extended period of time during which the

¹ [Regulation 10A of The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012 \(as amended\)](#)

Council will not have an up to date Local Plan, making us vulnerable to 'speculative' development proposals.

Officers are committed to working closely with Members during the review of the current Local Plan to meet these timescales and protect the Council and its residents from unsuitable speculative applications.

6. Timetable.

An updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) is to be presented to Cabinet for approval in November. The LDS will provide the timetable and details of the necessary tasks required to be undertaken during the development of a new Local Plan. The timetable will be based on the submission of a Publication version of the Local Plan for examination by the Secretary of State by the December 2026 deadline.

7. Outcomes

In carrying out its task, the Working Group should have regard to the commitment within the Terms of Reference and the fact that it is in the best interests of all residents that the Council has an up to date Plan, in accordance with national policy and regulations, as quickly as possible.