

Planning & Transportation Policy Working Group Meeting	
Meeting Date	19 September 2023
Report Title	Local Plan Review – next steps discussion paper
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson, Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning
Lead Officer	Jill Peet, Planning Policy Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	Members are asked to consider the content of this report and to agree the working group’s preferred option for progressing with the Local Plan Review – to recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that members defer a decision as to a timescale for the future stages of the Local Plan Review until such time as the national planning landscape is clearer, but independent of this process, to proceed to develop the evidence base regarding local development need and potential, with this process to be wholly reflective of local circumstance rather than central targets.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to take stock of the options for moving forward with the Local Plan Review (LPR) now that the local elections have concluded, and membership of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group is established. The Working Group is asked to consider the options presented in the draft report for Policy and Resources Committee at Appendix I and to make a recommendation for a preferred option to be presented, having considered the pros and cons of each.

2 Background

- 2.1 The background to this item is set out fully in Appendix i. The Local Plan is a key document that provides the blueprint for where development should take place. It includes policies and proposals on appropriate types of development and is a strategic tool for delivering the spatial objectives of the Corporate Plan. It also identifies which infrastructure is needed (and where) to support new development. Additionally, it sets out where development cannot take place. If a Local Plan is adopted and less than five years old, it takes primacy in the determination of planning applications. Without an up-to-date local plan, reduced

weight can be given and the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies.

- 2.2 Members of the PTPWG discussed the options set out in section 3 of this report at length during an informal, inaugural discussion session in July. The consensus of the group was to recommend a hybrid work programme of options ii and iv, deferring any decision as to a timescale for the future stages of the Local Plan Review until such time as the national planning landscape is clearer, but independent of this process, proceeding to develop the evidence base regarding local development need and potential, with this process to be wholly reflective of local circumstance rather than central targets.

3 Proposals

Members considered the following options for next steps regarding the Local Plan Review:

- i. **Actively choose not to proceed with the Local Plan Review until such time as greater clarity is available regarding the national policy framework.** Many LPAs across the country have called time on or delayed their local plans. The planning reforms first set out in the Planning White Paper in August 2020 have been delayed repeatedly. A case could be made for not progressing with an LPR at Swale.
- ii. **Choose not to proceed with any formal stages of the Local Plan Review until the government publishes a national policy framework members can support but continue to develop the evidence base.** Work on the LPR would continue in a technical sense but it would not be the main priority for the Planning Policy team, focussing on other areas such as supporting Development Management or producing a Design Code for the borough.
- iii. **Actively proceed with the Local Plan Review, aiming to meet the Local Housing Need (LHN) figure in full.** Continue with preparations for the LPR aiming to meet the full housing needs quantum currently set by government.
- iv. **Actively proceed with the Local Plan Review, aiming to meet a lower, evidenced number.** An alternative but evidenced number could be lower than the government target. The rationale for a lower figure would need to be evidenced to make this a workable option in light of the legislative and regulatory framework within which local plans are prepared and adopted.
- v. **Explore options to produce a joint plan with neighbouring authority/ authorities.** This would be along similar lines to the structure plans produced by county councils until the late 1990s. The housing numbers would be the same but shared across the partner authority areas.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to explore the options. Each has pros and cons which are discussed in Appendix I.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The recommendation at 2.2 was developed during informal discussion of working group members in July 2023.
- 5.2 The discussion from today's working group meeting will be set out in the version of this report that is presented to Policy and Resources Committee in October. No other consultation is recommended at this stage.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Progressing with a sound Local Plan Review will deliver Corporate Plan objectives to build the right homes in the right places and to support quality jobs for all.
Financial, Resource and Property	Preparation of a sound local plan is within existing financial resources and commitments
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Preparation and adoption of a sound local plan would be done within the legal, statutory and procurement framework
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	Preparing a sound local plan will contribute to delivering Environmental and Climate/ Ecological Emergency objectives
Health and Wellbeing	Preparing a sound local plan will contribute to delivering Health and Wellbeing infrastructure including physical buildings and opportunities for sport, leisure and recreation
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	The lack of an up to date Local Plan increases the risks of speculative development applications.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Local Plan Review Next Steps: Report to Policy and Resources Committee (draft)

8 Background Papers

None