

Report for: ACTION
Item Number: 6



<b>Contains Confidential or Exempt Information</b>	<b>Part I</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Borough Local Plan Consultation</b>
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<b>For Consideration By</b>	Local Plans Working Group
<b>Date to be Considered</b>	30 June 2015

### Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Summer 2015 consultation on Borough Local Plan evidence and questions, leading up to a Borough Local Plan Second Preferred Options Consultation which is due to start in November 2015.

## 1. Details of Recommendations

**RECOMMENDATION: That the Local Plans Working Group:**

### 1. Notes the content of this report.

#### Background

- 2.1 Members will recall that, in January 2014, the council consulted residents, businesses and other people interested in planning in the borough, on a (first) Preferred Options Borough Local Plan (BLP). This set out the council's preferred approach to future development and included proposed policies on town centres, the environment, housing, the economy, infrastructure and many other matters including potential

development sites on the edge of settlements. Over 6,000 responses from almost 1,000 respondents were received and have been analysed. A summary of consultation responses is included in the council's Consultation Statement.

- 2.2 In February 2015 the council's Cabinet reviewed the work undertaken to date and agreed to continue the preparation of the BLP, including an ongoing programme of engagement and consultation with stakeholders. As a result, starting this summer and continuing through the year, the council has prepared a package of consultation items on which it is seeking stakeholders' views. The first stages of the consultation include some of the background evidence that is needed to justify the policies in the plan.
- 2.3 Officers will consider all responses received and this will feed into the preparation of a Second Preferred Options BLP, with a full consultation planned for that document to commence in November 2015. The Second Preferred Options will set out any areas where the council's preferred approach has changed as a result of consultation responses or other new evidence. It will also include a few matters that were not included in the (first) Preferred Options BLP because the supporting evidence was not available at that stage.
- 2.4 Starting this summer and continuing through the year, the council intends to seek views on a number of pieces of new research and some questions about specific areas of policy direction. The matters proposed to be included in his consultation package are set out below.

### Evidence Base

#### *A. Retail and Town Centre Study*

- 2.5 This is a key piece of evidence used to support the BLP policies on shopping and other key town centre uses. It is also used by development control officers to help assess applications for large new retail developments such as The Landing. The study assesses the capacity to support new shopping floorspace in four key town centres in the borough (Maidenhead, Windsor, Ascot and Sunningdale) and looks at the characteristics of those centres and options for their future development, as well as providing a commentary on trends and changes in the retail market and their influence on future development patterns.
- 2.6 Currently in draft form, the study has been made available to selected Duty to Cooperate and town centre stakeholders for comment, and it is proposed to open up this process to allow for comments from residents, businesses and any other interested parties. A stakeholder workshop was held on 23 June and has already provided some useful feedback on the draft study. The draft study is attached as a background paper to this report.  
**Timescale:** Study already in the public domain; full consultation from 30 June.

## B. Call for Sites

- 2.7 The council has a duty to review and assess possible development sites across the borough and, as part of this, has issued a call for sites. This means that landowners, developers or residents can suggest potential sites which are available and deliverable and could be developed for a variety of uses. Suggested sites can be for housing, specialist housing such as communal accommodation without significant care or gypsy, travellers and travelling showpeople's accommodation, employment, retail, tourism, leisure, waste management, minerals extraction and/or processing or a mix of these uses. The sites are then fed into a database and considered for their suitability for development and inform the process of updating adopted planning policies in the Local Plan. Members may be aware that the council already maintains information on sites promoted for housing in the form of the current Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment. The "call for sites" will be used to update this initial study and widen it to consider other types of development to create a Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment.
- 2.8 If a site is suggested it does not mean the council necessarily thinks that it is suitable for development, but it does enable a full and proper assessment of all the development options to be undertaken. This information has many purposes – including supporting the BLP, bringing more certainty to the borough's housing supply and providing evidence of site availability. Anybody can suggest a site but, the more information that can be supplied, the better the assessment will be.
- 2.9 To date the Council has received 103 sites. Officers are currently analysing records to see how many of these sites are new. The Council has extended the period of time available for minerals and waste sites to be received, as these sites can require preliminary investigation prior to the sites being identified in this process by landowners, agents and operators.  
**Timescale:** In progress now and ongoing. Official closing date extended to 20 July but submissions will be accepted at any time. Officers will provide an update at the meeting.

## C. Edge of Settlement Part 1 Green Belt Purpose Assessment and Part 2 Constraints, Opportunities and Deliverability Assessment

- 2.10 To produce a BLP that can be found sound at examination, it is necessary to assess the borough's green belt and examine whether individual parts of it satisfy national policy tests for inclusion. This is evidence that is required to justify either the release of land from the green belt, or its continued inclusion. The methodology for a green belt analysis and an analysis of edge of settlement sites has now been developed and it is proposed to seek comments on it.
- 2.11 The National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to seek positive opportunities to meet development needs. Key to this approach is the assessment of constraints to allow the council to understand whether they remain valid.
- 2.12 Officers have prepared draft methodology statements setting out how the council has to date assessed the contribution land makes to the purposes of Green Belt and how the wider suitability of land for development has been assessed. It is proposed that the

methodologies are subject to consultation with relevant local authorities and wider organisations.

**Timescale:** July

#### D. Functional Economic Market Area

- 2.13 As part of drawing up the BLP, the council needs evidence on the demand for new employment development (offices, industry, warehousing and other uses). Because the economy is not restricted solely to the borough boundaries, we need to look wider to assess demand. The borough sits within a “functional economic market area” (FEMA) and the extent of this area needs to be defined, in order that the scale of development needed within it can be assessed in the future. The council intends to commission work on a definition of a FEMA and is discussing the possibility of joint working with other local authorities. The results will feed into the policies in the Second Preferred Options BLP.

**Timescale:** Commissioning of work in summer 2015

#### E. Transport Modelling

- 2.14 New development will have an impact on the borough’s transport network, particularly its roads, and the effect of proposed development needs to be assessed. It is proposed to make available the latest report once it has been updated by the council’s consultants.

**Timescale:** August

#### F. Flood Risk

- 2.15 Many parts of the borough are at risk of flooding, as was proved in the winter of 2013/14. This restricts the type and amount of development that can happen in those areas. The evidence used to assess flood risk is contained within a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. Evidence to help decide whether a potential site can be included in the BLP as a site allocation is contained in the Flooding Sequential Test document. This is a “live” document that assesses potential sites at one point in time. This means it needs to be flexible enough to be updated as new sites come forward, for example as part of the Call for Sites work.

- 2.16 It is proposed to make available the latest draft of the Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment work once it has been updated by the council’s consultants in association with the Environment Agency. The latest information on the flooding sequential test will also be made available.

**Timescale:** August

#### G. Gypsies and Travellers

- 2.17 The council has a legal duty to provide sufficient site accommodation for Travellers. Sufficient provision allows for better enforcement against unauthorised encampments. A Gypsies and Travellers Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) has been commissioned through Adult and Community Services. Following receipt of the study, the council will be in a position to prepare an issues and options paper as the initial stage of a

dedicated plan process. A separate plan process is recommended so as not to inhibit the progression of the BLP. It is important to note that positive progression of the dedicated plan would be required to provide the Planning Inspectorate with the necessary confidence that this issue, which would ordinarily be addressed within the BLP, is being properly addressed.

**Timescale:** Dependent on receipt of the GTAA.

#### H. Strategic Housing Market Assessment

- 2.18 Planning for homes and jobs is a central element of the BLP. National planning policy recognises that housing need should be assessed for functional housing market areas. These are geographical areas defined by household demand and preferences for all types of housing, reflecting the key functional linkages between places where people live and work. The council has jointly commissioned with the other Berkshire local authorities a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). This will define the functional housing market or markets relevant to the Berkshire authorities and related development needs. To support this project, a stakeholder workshop was held on 18 June on the identification of housing market area and the methodology to assess need.
- Timescale:** Publication in summer 2015.

#### Specific Policy Questions

- 2.19 The elements listed above form part of a proposed package of ongoing consultation and engagement over the summer and beyond. In addition, it is proposed to seek views on some specific policy questions that will feed into the development of policies in the Second Preferred Options BLP.

#### A. Local Green Space

- 2.20 Local green space is a designation enabled by national policy that allows areas of specific importance to local communities to be defined and protected from development. It is part of the role of neighbourhood plans to identify locally important characteristics and features. In some parts of the borough, neighbourhood plans are being developed that will propose local green space designations. But not all of the borough is yet covered by neighbourhood plans, and not all of the plans will contain policies about local green space. So it is proposed to include some designations in the BLP to ensure that no area loses out.
- 2.21 There are strict rules that must be followed if a local green space designation is to be successful – the land has to be:
- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
  - demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance; and
  - local in character – not an extensive tract of land.
- 2.22 In addition, national policy says that if areas are already protected by other designations, such as green belt, there will need to be an assessment of whether any additional local benefit would be gained by designation as local green space. Within

these constraints, it is proposed to ask residents and other stakeholders whether they are aware of any areas that could be suitable for designation, and to explain why they think the areas are suitable.

### B. Braywick Park and Magnet Leisure Centre

2.23 The Magnet Leisure Centre is a popular facility but is ageing and will soon need a lot of money to be spent on either refurbishing or replacing it. The council is considering providing a new leisure centre at Braywick Park to replace the Magnet, which would mean removing Braywick Park from the green belt and allocating the site for leisure and recreation use. Before further work is undertaken, it is proposed to seek residents' views on the relocation of the Magnet Leisure Centre to Braywick Park. Following discussions with the Head of Leisure Services, it is proposed to ask a question about the current facilities at the Magnet, to seek views on which facilities would be used in any new development. Please note that the focus of this question may change as the consultation material is further developed.

### C. Capacity of Maidenhead Town Centre

2.24 If the Magnet Leisure Centre was replaced by a new facility in Braywick Park, the existing site would be made available for redevelopment. There are a number of other sites around Maidenhead Town Centre, already identified in the Maidenhead Town Centre Area Action Plan (AAP) that are also available for development. Through the regeneration activities linked to Maidenhead town centre, it is believed there is scope to deliver a greater amount of housing development than currently accounted for.

2.25 To provide a framework to agree any increased capacity, the council is producing a tall buildings strategy to consider where greater flexibility in building heights could be considered beyond that envisaged by the AAP. Currently the AAP identifies the areas around the railway station and West Street as being suitable for tall buildings. It is proposed to ask residents and other stakeholders a question to find out where they think there is the greatest potential for tall buildings in and around Maidenhead town centre.

### D. Windsor Link Railway

2.26 The linking of the two railway lines in Windsor could deliver significant improvements in public transport links. Currently, the lines to Windsor & Eton Central and Windsor & Eton Riverside stations are run independently, with through services not possible and interchange difficult. The Windsor Link Railway proposal is for a new tunnel under the town centre, creating one Windsor station serving both networks on one continuous railway line.

2.27 It is proposed to include support in the BLP for the linking of the two lines in Windsor, provided it can be demonstrated there would be no substantial harm to heritage assets. In order to ascertain whether residents are in favour of the scheme and identify any concerns they may have, it is proposed to ask a question about their views on the proposal.

## Second Preferred Options Consultation

2.28 It is intended to develop the wording of questions to cover the topics described above, and open these out to public consultation over the summer of 2015. The results will feed into preparation and review of the policy approach to be put forward in the BLP Second Preferred Options consultation, which will commence in November 2015. As previously agreed by Cabinet, it is proposed for the Second Preferred Options consultation to include new or revised preferred policies on these topics:

- Amount and distribution of housing
- Allocated housing development sites
- Safeguarded land
- Community facilities (Braywick Park)
- Major developed sites in the green belt
- Affordable housing
- Maidenhead and Windsor town centres
- Minerals and waste
- Sustainable transport

2.29 Further information will be made available to this group as the consultation and policy options develop.

Background papers:

Retail and Town Centre Study 2015 – draft report and appendices