



Committee and Date

Cabinet

21 June 2017

Shropshire Council Local Plan Review

Responsible Officer Adrian Cooper, Planning Policy & Strategy Manager

Email: adrian.cooper@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01743 254601

1. Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the publication of a revised version of the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) (attached as Appendix A) and to provide a summary of the feedback received from the recent consultation on 'Issues and Strategic Options' for the Shropshire Local Plan Review. The LDS is the 'Project Plan' that describes the current documents which make up the statutory Development Plan for Shropshire and the Local Plan documents that are to be prepared over the next 3-year period to replace existing policies;
- 1.2 Shropshire Council is required by legislation and national policy to make the LDS available on its website and to keep it up-to-date so that local communities and interested parties can keep track of progress with the Local Plan. As reported to Cabinet on 18 January 2017, the Local Plan needs to be reviewed to ensure that it remains up to date and can be given full weight in planning decisions;
- 1.3 The current published version of the LDS dates from October 2014 and therefore needs to be updated. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to prepare an update any earlier because of the extensive uncertainty generated by successive changes to the Local Plan process in national policy. The updated LDS covers the period 2017 to 2020 and will be kept up to date by considering the need to revise it on an annual basis.

2. Recommendations

- A. That Cabinet approves the updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) attached (Appendix A) subject to the need for minor amendments and editing;
- B. That authority is delegated to the Director of Place and Enterprise in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulation to approve and publish the final version of the document.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 There are significant risks that could impact upon delivery of the Local Plan to the schedules set out within this Local Development Scheme. In order to minimise possible impacts, risk management has been embedded in the Local Plan production processes in order that risk can be evaluated and where possible eliminated. The Risk Management Log (Appendix 2) of the LDS contains an analysis of the main areas of uncertainty and risk involved in reviewing and updating the Local Plan. Risks with a significant potential impact include: inadequate resourcing; staff turnover and recruitment difficulties; receipt of large numbers of objections; and delays generated by the Planning Inspectorate or further changes in national policy. Whilst proposed responses or mitigation measures have been set out, seeking where possible, to manage these risks, some areas of risk are outside the Council's control. In addition, financial pressures could curtail many of the proposed mitigation measures.
- 3.2 The risk assessment suggests that the Local Plan programme remains extremely challenging. For example, where individual project production milestones are missed it could be difficult to get "back on track" without impacts on other elements of the overall programme. Given however, that the production of a Local Plan is a statutory requirement in order to provide local planning policy coverage and deliver housing land, these risks must be accepted by the Council. The most fundamental overall mitigation measures that can be made are to ensure sufficient resources are available throughout the timescale of the LDS and build-in realistic document production timescales into this LDS at the outset.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the LDS itself, but financial implications potentially arise from slippage in the timetable leading to delays in Local Plan production with subsequent impacts on development management decision making, housing land supply and infrastructure funding. Recommendations from the government's Local Plans Expert Group (LPEG) and national regulations (yet to be published) from the Housing and Planning Act suggest that the government will apply sanctions in the form of reduced New Homes Bonus for when an authority fails to meet its LDS milestones. Informal guidance from the Department for Communities & Local Government strongly suggests that for councils like Shropshire with a Local Plan or part of a Plan adopted before the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the government is expecting prompt progress towards the formal submission of a replacement Local Plan.

5. Background

Local Plan Issues & Strategic Options Consultation

- 5.1 Following approval from Cabinet on 18 January 2017, consultation documents for this initial stage of the Local Plan Review were published on 23 January 2017 for a period of 8 weeks. About 400 responses were received to the consultation and these

will be used to inform the preparation of 'Preferred Options' as described in the LDS in Appendix A. Analysis of the responses indicates that:

- i. **Housing Requirement:** Whilst there was a slight preference for the 'moderate' growth option, there was also a good level of support for 'high' levels of housing growth. Many of those who favoured 'moderate' growth cited the need to protect rural areas from development and the impact on environmental and amenity values. Many respondents favouring 'significant' growth argued that this option would achieve a balance between the need to deliver economic growth and infrastructure and environmental impacts, and most closely represented the current levels of growth identified in the Core Strategy. Of those favouring the 'high' growth option, many considered it represented the best opportunity to deliver flexible growth and would help enable greater inward investment. Common themes across all responses were the need to support additional and timely infrastructure provision, prioritising brownfield development and supporting a greater focus on the type of housing built, including the need to deliver more affordable housing. Several responses suggested a much lower housing requirement of around 17,000 dwellings over the Plan period, whilst others suggested the 'high' growth option did not go far enough.
- ii. **Spatial Distribution:** Whilst responses to this question were well spread, there was a slight preference to see a greater urban focus for development. Many who favoured a continuation of 'Rural Rebalance' argued this distribution, which reflects the current development strategy, is working well. Several comments cited the need to sustain rural services and facilities as a reason to continue to pursue 35% of housing in the rural area. Of those supporting an 'Urban Focus', many argued that this option would push development to more sustainable settlements with better access to infrastructure provision and employment opportunities. Many who favoured 'Balanced Growth' considered this option would help protect rural areas whilst continuing to allow necessary development in appropriate locations. Other comments highlighted a desire to see greater distinction between market towns to reflect differences in their scale, role and location, the need to capitalise on cross border opportunities e.g. HS2 and Midland Engine, and the need to give weight to Community-Led Plans.
- iii. **Economic Growth Strategy:** Each of the three economic growth options presented was recognised, to varying degrees, as offering a sustainable and viable growth option for the Shropshire economy, although uncertainty derives from the recent economic downturn and the potential effects of Brexit. Whilst a new economic approach was preferred, the economic and employment objectives already presented in the Core Strategy were still considered appropriate and relevant. This desire for a new approach sought a 'step change' in economic productivity and the quality of employment provided in the County reflecting the aims of the draft Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy published in March 2017;
- iv. **Delivery of Employment:** The proposed investment in national infrastructure projects including HS2, highway projects and the creation of sub-regional investment zones around these developments were seen as opportunities to help deliver the new approach to economic growth in Shropshire. However, the real challenge is seen to arise from the need to ensure that Shropshire's networks of market towns, key centres and their road and rail infrastructure could

accommodate these new opportunities. Responses emphasised the significant economic potential of Shropshire's existing economy, workforce and environment, together with the need to integrate our existing economic strengths with future investment opportunities in and around the County;

- v. **Community Hubs:** Most respondents supported the proposed criteria-based approach to identifying Community Hubs. Many felt that this provides a clear and objective assessment which would encourage development in sustainable locations. However, some respondents had concerns about the implications of this approach for the location and scale of future development and felt that the final decision should rest with the local community concerned. A range of comments were received on the proposed methodology and these have been used to make a number of amendments to the methodology. A final version of the methodology will be made available on the Shropshire Council website alongside the summary of the consultation responses received;
- vi. **Community Clusters:** Whilst concerns were expressed about the impact and pace of recent development in some Community Cluster settlements, most respondents were content for existing Clusters to remain unchanged, and for no additional Clusters to be identified. Whilst some felt that Clusters should be identified using a methodology similar to that proposed for Hubs, others that it should continue to be up to the community and the Parish Councils who represent them;
- vii. **Criteria-based Approach:** Both the use of criteria-based policies and the proposed criteria which will be used to manage development in Hubs and Clusters were considered appropriate by most respondents. However, some respondents commented that development should help to meet local needs and they would like community views to carry more weight in the decision making process;
- viii. **Development Boundaries:** There was an almost exactly even split of responses concerning the proposed removal of development boundaries for Community Hub and Cluster settlements. Some considered that development boundaries are crucial to provide clarity, certainty and consistency whilst others considered that they can often be inappropriately restrictive, ruling out sensible proposals just because they fall the wrong side of a boundary.

5.2 The consultation also presented a draft methodology for the identification of Community Hubs. Respondents to the consultation were generally supportive of the proposed approach.

5.3 A detailed summary of the representations received will be published on the Council's webpages shortly. Key stakeholders such as parish councils and those who have previously registered to receive updates regarding the Local Plan Review will be notified of its availability.

Local Development Scheme

5.4 The spatial planning system is based on a portfolio of Local Plan documents and other components. Some are mandatory, whilst local authorities have a certain amount of discretion over whether others are needed. The programme of Local Plan work must be set out in a project timetable or Local Development Scheme (LDS), which must be published, and then monitored and kept up to date.

5.5 The updated LDS (Appendix A) sets out:

- The Local Plan documents that are to be prepared by Shropshire Council over the forthcoming 3-year period to replace existing policies;
- The current documents which make up the statutory Development Plan for Shropshire, including the Neighbourhood Plans (not prepared by Shropshire Council) which have been adopted and are in force;
- The subject matter and the geographical area to which each of the proposed documents relates;
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that are to be prepared over the forthcoming 3-year period to clarify and provide further guidance;
- Which organisation is to lead the process of each document preparation and which, if any, are to be prepared jointly with other local planning authorities;
- The arrangements for monitoring of the Local Plan;
- A risk assessment which sets out an analysis of the areas of uncertainty and risk facing production of the Local Plan.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Robert Macey, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory Services
Local Members All
Appendices A. Draft Shropshire Council Local Development Scheme 2017