

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	25 th NOVEMBER 2014	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	REVISED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ALL
LEAD OFFICER:	MARK WORRINGHAM	TEL:	0118 9373337
JOB TITLE:	PRINCIPAL PLANNER	E-MAIL:	mark.worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A Local Development Scheme (LDS) is a statutory programme tool, which sets out the planning policy documents that the Council intends to produce, and their purpose, timescales and geographical area.
- 1.2 This Committee approved a new LDS on 9th July 2013 (Minute 8 refers), and approved amendments to it on 20th November 2013 (Minute 19 refers). The main document proposed to be produced was a comprehensive Local Plan to replace all three existing development plan documents.
- 1.3 This report seeks a change to the LDS, primarily to amend the timescales for production of this Local Plan. The reason for this is that the strategy of that Plan will rely heavily on an evidence document on housing needs (a Strategic Housing Market Assessment) that the Council will be commissioning jointly with neighbouring authorities. This has been delayed due to ongoing discussions about which authorities will be participating.
- 1.4 This report therefore seeks approval of a revised LDS which shows the documents that the Council intends to produce over the coming years.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

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| 2.1 | That the Local Development Scheme (Appendix 2) be approved and brought into effect, and that it form the basis for production of planning policy, with effect from 25 th November 2014. |
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3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 A Local Development Scheme (LDS) is a document setting out the local planning authority's programme for producing planning policy documents. It lists the documents that are to be produced, sets out their scope and purpose, and sets out the broad timescales for its production, including important milestones. It is a statutory requirement under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 The Council produced a number of versions of its Local Development Scheme between 2005 and 2011 to manage the production of a range of development plans, all of which are now adopted (Core Strategy, Reading Central Area Action Plan and Sites and Detailed Policies Document). However, in 2012 the national context for producing planning policy changed, with new national policies in the National Planning Policy Framework, including a clear preference that a single Local Plan should be produced rather than several development plan documents.

- 4.2 This Committee therefore approved a new Local Development Scheme on 9th July 2013 (Minute 8 refers) which, in particular, set out a programme for producing a comprehensive Local Plan to replace the three development plan documents listed above. An amended version of the LDS was approved by this Committee on 20th November 2013 (Minute 19 refers), which allowed for an alteration to the Council's existing affordable housing policies prior to reviewing the Local Plan in full.

(b) Option Proposed

- 4.5 Committee is recommended to approve the Local Development Scheme 2014 (Appendix 2) as the programme for producing planning policy documents.

- 4.6 The main changes from the 2013 version of the LDS are as follows:

- The timescales for production of a Local Plan have been pushed backwards. The main reason for this is that the Council intends to co-operate with neighbouring authorities on a study to identify levels of housing need. Such studies need to be produced to cover a whole housing market area rather than an individual authority in order to

comply with national policy. It has taken some time for it to become clear which authorities in Berkshire wish to co-operate in this study, and this has resulted in a delay in its production. Since levels of housing to be provided are such a significant element of the Local Plan, it would make little sense to begin consulting on Issues and Options until the Council knows what the level of housing need will be.

The Council has already undertaken the first stage of this consultation, a call for potential development sites to be nominated (as well as sites for other potential designations, including protection). It is critical that the process for assessing these potential development sites takes into account a complete understanding of needs and its implications on infrastructure, such as schools, transport and health provision. In this regard, officers will need to work both across the organisation and with neighbouring authorities to ensure that proposed development remains sustainable.

- Some documents listed in the 2013 LDS as documents still to be produced (e.g. the Statement of Community Involvement and the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report) are now complete.
- Some proposed Supplementary Planning Documents have now been removed, as the Local Plan will need to be prioritised.

(c) Other Options Considered

- 4.7 There are two alternative options that could be considered;
- Proceed with the existing 2013 LDS; or
 - Produce a LDS with less ambitious timescales for the Local Plan.
- 4.9 Proceeding with the current LDS would mean moving to an Issues and Options consultation before information on housing needs is available in summer 2015. However, proposed housing figures are potentially the most important element of the Local Plan, and a consultation on this matter without including housing figures would be incomplete. This would mean needing to undertake a second Issues and Options consultation after housing figures become available, which would be a poor use of resources.
- 4.10 Producing a LDS with less ambitious timescales would leave Reading for a longer period without planning policy in place to cover some important issues. This may leave the Council vulnerable to appeals, particularly as 'objectively assessed development needs' specified by the NPPF had not been set, and could therefore result in some loss of control over the form and scale of development. Lengthening the process could also mean less effective use of resources in the long term, as, for instance, evidence gathered to support an early stage of the document would need major updates before the document is finalised.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Local Development Scheme will contribute to achieving the following strategic aims, through production of planning policy to fulfil key aims:

- The development of Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley;
- Establishing Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit;
- Promoting equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The Local Development Scheme is simply a programme for production of planning documents, and will not be subject to community engagement. However, the LDS does programme community involvement stages for a number of documents. These community involvement stages will need to comply with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

7.1 The Scoping Assessment, included at Appendix 1 identifies that an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not required for the LDS, as there is no reason to believe that specific groups will be affected any differently from others by the LDS.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The content of Local Development Schemes is specified in Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by Section 180 of the Planning Act 2008 and Section 111 of the Localism Act 2011. Under the legislation, the LDS must list the development plan documents to be produced, set out their subject matter, geographical area and timescales, and which are to be prepared jointly.

8.2 The LDS has also had regard to the legislation on the process of production of the individual documents it lists, which is set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2008 (as amended) and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The production of the LDS itself will be funded from existing budgets and has no significant financial implications. The main financial implications of the LDS lies with the documents that the LDS proposes to prepare, in particular the Local Plan.

- 9.2 Production of planning policy documents is generally carried out within existing budgets, and this will largely be the case with the documents listed in the LDS. However, there are some elements of producing these documents that can have significant resource implications, depending on how they are carried out.
- 9.3 Consultation exercises can be resource intensive, particularly at early stages where the focus is on engaging as many people as possible, and on asking wide-ranging and open-ended questions. However, the Council's consultation process is based mainly on electronic communication, which helps to minimise resource costs.
- 9.4 Another main area where there can be significant financial implications is in producing the evidence base, particularly where the use of external consultants is required. Some external consultants will be needed when considering matters such as housing need, minerals planning and retail need. Consultants will only be used where they genuinely represent the best option in terms of value for money.
- 9.5 Finally, the other significant cost is a public examination, which will be required for the Local Plan. These examinations can cost tens of thousands of pounds. They are an inescapable fact of producing development plans, although the length and scope of these examinations can be minimised by seeking to resolve objections before the examination, as well as by combining documents into one document with one examination, as is proposed with the Local Plan.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 9.6 The preparation of a robust set of planning policy documents, as set out in the LDS, will ensure that developments are appropriate to their area, that significant effects are mitigated, that contributions are made to local infrastructure, and that there are no significant environmental, social and economic effects. Robust policies will also reduce the likelihood of planning by appeal, which can result in the Council losing control over the form of some development, as well as significant financial implications. Production of the documents set out, in line with legislation, national policy and best practice, therefore represents good value for money.

Risk Assessment

- 9.7 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 15)
- Localism Act 2011 (Section 111)
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Local Development Scheme 2013

APPENDIX 1: EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Local Development Scheme

Directorate: ENCAS - Environment, Culture and Sport

Service: Planning and Building Control

Name: Mark Worringham

Job Title: Principal Planner

Date of assessment: 09/10/2014

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

To set out the programme for producing planning policy documents.

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

The Council will benefit from having an agreed programme and way forward for planning policy. Stakeholders, including members of the public and the development industry, will benefit from more certainty about what documents and consultations to expect and when.

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

The outcome will be a clear programme for document production.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

Developers/landowners, the public and community groups, infrastructure providers. All parties want an easily digestible summary of which planning policy documents will be produced and when so that they are better able and resourced to engage when consultation processes come about. It will also inform how and when developers or landowners intend to bring forward potential development sites.

Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes ☐ No ☒

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes ☐ No ☒

If the answer is Yes to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because the Local Development Scheme in itself is merely a programme for producing documents. Documents within the LDS may have different effects on different groups, but since these have not yet been produced it is impossible to determine what those effects would be. Where this is the case, an Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on individual documents as they are produced.

Signed (completing officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 9 th October 2014
Signed (Lead Officer)	Mark Worringham	Date: 9 th October 2014