

# West Suffolk Local Plan Draft Issues and Options documents – approval for public consultation

<b>Report number:</b>	<b>CAB/WS/20/057</b>	
<b>Report to and dates:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	22 September 2020
	<b>Council</b>	29 September 2020
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**Decisions Plan:** This item is included on the Decisions Plan.

**Wards impacted:** All wards

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that, subject to the approval of Council, Cabinet:

1. **Endorses the West Suffolk Local Plan Issues and Options documents for public consultation, as set out in Appendix A to Report number CAB/WS/20/057; and**
2. **gives delegated authority to the Service Manager (Strategic Planning) to make minor non-material consequential changes to the documents as necessary.**

## 1. Context

- 1.1 The Local Plan is important in supporting delivery of our strategic priorities and essential for the continuation of an effective planning service. In addition, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, (2004), requires local planning authorities to prepare and keep an up-to-date Local Plan.
- 1.2 West Suffolk Council is preparing a new Local Plan that once complete will replace the various documents which together form the existing Development Plan for West Suffolk:
- Former Forest Heath area Core Strategy (2010)
  - Former St Edmundsbury area Core Strategy (2010).
  - Former Forest Heath area Single Issue review (SIR) (2019)
  - Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015)
  - Former Edmundsbury area 'Vision' Site Allocation documents (2014)
  - Former Forest Heath area Sites Allocation Local Plan (2019)

## 2. West Suffolk Local Plan Draft Issues and Options documents

- 2.1 This report asks the Cabinet to endorse the West Suffolk Local Plan Issues and Options Draft (Appendix A) and refer the document to Council for approval for public consultation.
- 2.2 The new West Suffolk Local Plan will plan for the period to 2040 which aligns with local plans being produced by neighbouring authorities. The Issues and Options Local Plan consultation is the first of several rounds of public consultation in the local plan preparation process.
- 2.3 The West Suffolk Issues and Options Local Plan document has three main parts:
- **Part one** sets out the spatial vision, strategic objectives and issues, a new draft settlement hierarchy and options for the distribution of growth.
  - **Part two** sets out local issues concerning climate change, housing, employment, retail, leisure, wellbeing, transport, support for rural communities, the natural and historic environment and horse racing. Responses to this section of the document will help inform the preparation of the development management policies used in the day to day determination of planning applications.
  - **Part three** sets out a settlement profile for those places which could potentially be allocated sites for various uses in the plan period. There is a short introduction to each settlement along with a constraints map and details of those sites that are 'included' in the council's 2020 Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability

Assessment (SHELAA) and which therefore could be suitable for future development.

- 2.4 A series of questions in each section invite comments on whether right issues and options have been identified, if there are other issues or options not considered and which option is most appropriate.
- 2.5 A Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulations Assessment, Sustainable Settlements Study, Environmental Constraints Study and the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment will be published alongside the Issues and Options local plan as supporting documents.

### **3. Alternative options**

- 3.1 The alternative option would be to not progress a new Local Plan or delay preparation and consultation. This would leave the Council at risk of unplanned, speculative development. This would be reputationally damaging and lead to Government intervention to produce a Local Plan for the District Council. See section 5 below.
- 3.2 In assembling the Issues and Options document, a series of five member workshops were held. These workshops explored issues and options for both the content of the plan, and consultation methods. These workshops ensured alignment with the Council's Strategic Framework and fed into the production of the final consultation document (Appendix A) and a programme for consultation and engagement.
- 3.3 The Issues and Options Local Plan document itself considers reasonable alternatives and options to accommodate growth and plan for the future of West Suffolk. The consultation also asks if there are alternative issues and options that the Council should consider.
- 3.4 Following this first consultation, the next stage will be to review the comments received and together with evidence prepare a Preferred Options document which will be subject to consultation, programmed for September 2021 to November 2021.

### **4. Consultation and engagement**

- 4.1 The Council has recently updated its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as a result of Covid-19. The SCI sets out how West Suffolk Council intends to liaise with the public on planning matters, such as the development of the Local Plan. The SCI shows a change of consultation emphasis, as due to the coronavirus it is not currently possible to provide a hard copy of the Local Plan to view in person in our council offices, or easily meet groups of people face-to-face. Instead, more virtual

consultation events are proposed for the Issues and Options Local Plan consultation.

- 4.2 A programme of consultation and engagement has been prepared considering these changing circumstances and national guidelines. This has been designed to engage with as wide range of people and ages across our communities as possible. Officers will monitor the ongoing situation in case any changes need to be made in the light of new Government guidance on coronavirus.

The process of engagement has been designed to help people understand the Local Plan, its importance for them and West Suffolk. It also explains how individuals and groups can be involved in the process and have their say. The language and tone of the materials is designed to help give our communities ownership of the Plan.

- 4.3 It is proposed to **consult on the Issues and Options Local Plan and supporting documents for 10 weeks from Tuesday 13 October to Tuesday 22 December 2020.**

This engagement programme will involve a range of methods including and not restricted to:

- Media releases and briefings
- Targeted stakeholder communications tailored for individual groups (for example youth group materials for young people being co designed with young people)
- Social media including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram with materials such as films and graphics
- Town/parish council magazine articles
- Posters and other materials that can be printed with QR codes to use in public places i.e. shops, health centres and libraries
- Online virtual exhibition with interactive material
- Live chat function to speak to a member of the planning team to understand the consultation documents, ask questions and submit comments
- Member and town/parish council packs to include a range of materials
- Material where appropriate will also support residents to be able to send in their comments and engage in the process through online and letter

- 4.4 The Local Development Scheme (LDS), the document which sets out what planning policy documents the Council intends to produce and the timescale for their preparation, has been modified to reflect the slight delay caused by Covid-19. A link to the programme for the production of the West Suffolk Local Plan can be found under background documents below.

## **5. Risks associated with the proposals**

- 5.1 Failure to proceed in a timely manner with the preparation of the new Local Plan through to adoption will leave the Authority with a dated Local Plan, leading to less control over development across the district. West Suffolk would be at high risk of speculative, unsuitable, uncontrolled development. Development and infrastructure needs would be determined on a case by case basis rather than a strategically planned approach.
- 5.2 The option not to progress a new Local Plan would also leave the Council open to reputational damage and likely Government intervention to produce a Local Plan for the District Council.

## **6. Implications arising from the proposals**

- 6.1 Financial: It is considered that the preparation of the West Suffolk Local Plan can be delivered through to adoption within the Council's budget.
- 6.2 Legal Compliance: The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, (2004), requires Forest Heath District Council to prepare and keep an up-to-date Local Plan and consult on emerging plan proposals.
- 6.3 Personal Data Processing: Planning Policies consultation system is considered to be General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliant.
- 6.4 Equalities: The consultation and engagement programme recognises that community engagement with all sectors of society is important if we are to prepare an inclusive and forward-thinking local plan.
- 6.5 Crime and Disorder: The Suffolk Police Force and the Suffolk Police Architectural Liaison Officer will be consulted and engaged with throughout the consultation.
- 6.6 Environment or Sustainability: Supporting documents include a Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulations Assessment and Environmental Constraints Study.
- 6.8 Changes to existing policies: This is the initial formal intelligence gathering stage of preparing a new local plan for West Suffolk. Two further rounds of consultation are programmed. Once adopted the new plan and its policies will replace those in the existing development plan.

## **7. Appendices referenced in this report**

- 7.1 Appendix A: West Suffolk Local Plan - Issues and Options Draft Documents.

Note: Due to the length and filesize of the documents, Appendix A (which includes Parts 1, 2 and 3 and appendices) is only available electronically with the agenda papers for this Cabinet meeting, at the following link:

<https://democracy.westsuffolk.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=521&MIId=4666&Ver=4>

Any members wishing to receive to obtain a paper copy, may request a pack directly from Democratic Services.

## **8. Background documents associated with this report**

- 8.1 West Suffolk Local Plan Consultation and Engagement Strategy
- 8.2 Sustainability Appraisal
- 8.3 Habitat Regulations Assessment
- 8.4 Sustainable Settlements Study
- 8.5 Environmental Constraints Study
- 8.6 Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA Feb 2020)  
[https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning\\_Policies/shlaa.cfm](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning_Policies/shlaa.cfm)
- 8.7 Local development Scheme (LDS) Programme for the production of the West Suffolk Local Plan.  
[https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning\\_Policies/upload/LDS-2020-June-update.pdf](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning_Policies/upload/LDS-2020-June-update.pdf)
- 8.8 Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Amendment in Response to Covid 19. (June 2020)  
[https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning\\_Policies/upload/SCI-update-June-2020-web-version.pdf](https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/Planning_Policies/upload/SCI-update-June-2020-web-version.pdf)