

Overview and Scrutiny Board

Report subject	Local Plan Working Group
Meeting date	19 July 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	This report outlines the actions and any recommendation made by the Overview and Scrutiny Board's Local Plan Working Group at any meetings which have taken place since the last update to the Overview and Scrutiny Board.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: The Overview and Scrutiny Board consider and agree the actions and recommendations outlined in the report below.
Reason for recommendations	To ensure that the work of the Local Plan working group receives wider member engagement and endorsement.
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr P Broadhead, Regeneration, Economy and Strategic Planning
Corporate Director	Kate Ryan, Chief Operations Officer
Contributors	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O&S Board Chairman – Cllr S Bartlett • Christchurch – Cllr M Phipps and Cllr S McCormack • Bournemouth – Cllr D Kelsey and Cllr K Wilson • Poole – Cllr M Brooke (Chair of the Working Group) and Cllr F Rice <p>Support Officers:</p> <p>Mark Axford, Planning Policy Manager Laura Bright, Senior Planning Officer</p>
Wards	All – Authority Wide
Classification	For Update and Information

Introduction:

- 1.1 The last report to O & S Board was presented on 17th May, and covered discussions around two key issues related to the Government's standard method for calculating the housing need for BCP: a) availability and capacity of urban sites and b) developer and landowner promoted Green Belt sites.
- 1.2 It was agreed that the next step in the process was for officers to integrate the outcomes of those discussions into the emerging draft Issues and Options consultation paper for discussion at the next meeting of the working group.
- 1.3 The date for that meeting was set for 21st June allowing officers sufficient time to complete the document. However, the contentious nature of some sections of the Issues and Options document meant discussions took longer than originally anticipated. Two further sessions on 24th and 30th June took place, ensuring the whole document had been thoroughly reviewed.

Draft Issues and Options document:

- 2.1 The draft Issues and Options document was structured as below, and the Local Plan Working Group was taken through each section in turn.

- 1 Introduction
 - 2 About our area
 - 3 Objectives
 - 4 Issues and options
 - 4.1 Regenerating our town centres
 - 4.2 New market and affordable homes
 - 4.3 A prosperous economy
 - 4.4 Adapting our high streets and retail areas
 - 4.5 Reducing the need to travel
 - 4.6 Our natural environment
 - 4.7 Our built environment
 - 4.8 Promoting health and well being
 - 4.9 Tackling climate change
 - 4.10 Providing supporting infrastructure
 - 5 References

- 2.2 Members were given the chance to comment on each section and, as the discussions progressed, numerous changes were suggested with the majority being agreed to be incorporated into a revised version of the document. These revisions have been incorporated into the current draft.

- 2.3 Many of these changes were relatively minor but helped clarify the text. However, some resulted in more significant changes, for example, **lists of specific future highways and other transport improvement schemes were removed** for two reasons. Firstly, the lists included several schemes that had already been completed and secondly it was felt there was too much detail for what was essentially a relatively high-level document.
- 2.4 Other changes included the rewording of one Issues and Options heading as it was clear it did not reflect the actual content. Heading “4.5 Reducing the need to travel” has been amended to read “**4.5 Provide a safe, sustainable and convenient transport network**” which not only provides a more accurate description of the content but also identifies specific objectives. This was also reflected in the rewording of that objective.
- 2.5 Another aspect of the Issues and Options headings that provided some degree of angst among working party members was the numbering of and ordering of the Local Plan objectives. It was felt that using 1 to 10 gave the perception of an order of priority, and consequently, there was a potential need to adjust the ordering. Should Tackling Climate Change, for example, be placed nearer start of the list?
- 2.6 While there was no intention to prioritise any of the Issues and Options objectives it was **resolved that a) the numbers would be replaced with bullet points and b) the more appropriate time to adjust the ordering was at a later stage in the plan process i.e. when the actual plan, including policies was being written.**
- 2.7 While most of the concerns expressed by members of the working group could not be described as contentious, a number were. First amongst these was the reference to “City-Region” within the Vision . Objections to the use of the phrase were made by several members even though the group had been advised that the specific term is referenced in the Council’s Big Plan and therefore is reflecting aspirations of the council. It was also stated by the Portfolio holder that BCP is deemed a city-region by the Government for funding purposes.
- 2.8 It was argued by some members that the term could still be used for funding purposes but shouldn’t be included within the Local Plan since none of the existing towns is officially classed as a city. Furthermore, each of the three towns has its own distinct character and the term city region may be interpreted to treat them as a single entity at risk to their individual characters. .
- 2.9 As agreement within the group was unlikely to be achieved the following motion was proposed and seconded: **That the term “city-region” be removed from the document.** This was supported by a majority of 5 votes to 2, hence the following recommendation is made.
RECOMMENDATION: that the word “city” is removed from the document so that the vision states – “We aim for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole to be the UK’s newest region, brimming with prospects, positivity and pride.”

- 2.10 “New market and affordable homes” proved to be far the most controversial section. Government Planning Practice Guidance states that “Assessing housing need is first step in the process of deciding how many homes need to be planned for” and that “The National Planning Policy Framework **expects strategic policy making authorities to follow the standard method** in this guidance for assessing local housing need”. The draft Issues and Options document therefore proposes using the Government’s Standard Method of housing need as a starting point for consultation.
- 2.11 The Standard Method requires the use of the 2014 Office of National Statistics household projections, giving a housing need of 42,672 homes over the Plan period to 2038. Members were concerned that these figures were out of date. Members were advised that the Planning Practice Guidance explains that the 2014 figures are used to provide stability for planning authorities and to ensure that historic under delivery and declining affordability is reflected. They were also advised that the Guidance specifically states, “Any method which relies on using household projections more recently published than the 2014 projections will not be considered to be following the standard method”.
- 2.12 Work has shown through a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment that potential brown field sites do not have the capacity to meet the housing need calculated using the standard method. This remains the case even when allowing for the increased height of buildings and higher densities than is currently typical. The Guidance sets out that insufficient sites exist to meet the identified housing need then it is necessary to investigate how this shortfall can best be planned for. This would open up the need to review constraints to land availability and to consider what action could be taken to overcome them. This would include consulting on if any exceptional circumstance exist to amend the Green Belt boundary. Members of the Working Group found this unacceptable.
- 2.13 Members highlighted that the National Planning Policy Framework states: “To determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing needs assessment, conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance – **unless exceptional circumstances justify an alternative approach which also reflects current and future demographic trends and market signals.**” The Planning Practice Guidance also clarifies that the standard method it is not mandatory but “there is an expectation that the standard method will be used and that **any other method will be used only in exceptional circumstances**”. Members consider there is merit in exploring if exceptional circumstance exist to justify an alternative approach.
- 2.14 Government Planning Policy Guidance states that a Housing Needs Assessment should be the “first step in the process of deciding how many homes need to be planned for”. That Assessment is not yet complete.

- 2.15 In line with the guidance the current proposal in the draft Issues and Options consultation document uses the standard method to calculate housing need. The document then explains how the Housing Land Availability Assessment has assessed potential sites to accommodate that housing need. However, Members felt this was the wrong approach and that a Housing Needs Assessment should consider if exceptional circumstance exist to justify an alternative approach to calculating housing need. Members felt that this work would lead to the conclusion that the Government's Standard Method figure should be challenged.
- 2.16 As explained in the draft Issues and Option consultation work on a Housing Needs Assessment to examine the 2014 data feeding into the standard method calculation is underway but has not been completed. Until it is, there was concern that if the Issues and Options document were issued for consultation in its current form, it would not reflect any of the findings connected to a potentially revised housing need. This could have serious consequences for BCP should it be found that there is justification for a lower housing need. The first draft of the Housing Needs Assessment is due by the end of July.
- 2.17 In light of this and members' real concerns about housing need it was **resolved unanimously that the working group would reconvene in August once the results of the HNA become available in order to resolve this fundamental issue, as the outcome of the HNA will provide vital information to inform the Local Plan Issues and Options consultation.** Officers did however advise that even with these findings a comprehensive consultation would still be required. Both the standard method figure still and any alternative approach would need to be explained. Consultation about the range of options to meet housing needs would still be needed to gain public views on all sites including those that have been suggested to the council by landowners within the Green Belt. This would be to ensure a robust and transparent approach has been taken in the Plan making process.
- 2.18 Further amendments were also suggested to other parts of the document including Transportation, Gypsy and Traveller Sites, Environment and Climate Change. In some instances, further consultation and discussions with relevant service units may be required. It was **resolved that should further changes be required to these sections then they could be dealt with by email.** It is noted that some changes have been made in this regard.

Conclusions:

- 3.1 The amount of time put into the preparation of the Draft Issues and Options document and the work carried out by the Local Plan Working Group members is acknowledged with appreciation.
- 3.2 The changes made so far have added value to the document by clarifying and strengthening the text where needed. It also, when finalised, will be a more ambitious document reflecting the aspirations of BCP Council, especially with regard to providing a safe, sustainable and convenient transport network, higher quality environmental

and leisure facilities, and addressing the climate and ecological emergency. However, the short delay in its completion, is essential if it is to review the findings of the Housing Needs Assessment in relation housing need, for the public to respond to.

- 3.3 RECOMMENDATION to Overview and Scrutiny Board: To Reflect the Portfolio Holder's statement at Full Council on 22nd June 2021 in response to a question regarding the use of the Standard Method's 2014 data, Cabinet should await the initial findings of the Housing Needs Assessment, which will then be considered at a further meeting of the Local Plan Working Group, before the Issues and Options document is put out to consultation. The HNA will provide vital information to feed into the consultation relating to housing need within BCP. The Cabinet will delegate any changes to the consultation to the Head of Planning and the Portfolio Holder, taking into account any recommendation from the Working Group once it has met to discuss the findings of the HNA.**