

Report subject	Local Plan process
Meeting date	27 May 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	In June 2025, Cabinet agreed to prepare a new Local Plan under the Government's reformed plan-making system. The Government has now published the Regulations and guidance setting out the new process, which is intended to enable plans to be prepared and adopted within 30 months from Gateway 1. This report summarises the process and proposed timetable for preparing the new BCP Local Plan and seeks authorisation to undertake the Stage 1 ("Getting ready") activities, together with delegated authority to progress the Plan through the prescribed Gateway stages. Cabinet decisions will remain for each formal consultation stage. A cross party Working Group is being set up to guide the Local Plan.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet: 1. Give delegated authority to Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet to undertake the necessary activities to: a. Issue the Notice to Commence plan making; b. Publish the timetable and Project Initiation Document, and update as required. c. Publish a scoping consultation exercise for a period of 6 weeks. d. Progress the Local Plan through the Gateway stages. 2. Agree the Terms of Reference of the Local Plan Working Group.
Reason for recommendations	To agree the governance arrangements and enable work to formally commence on preparing a new Local Plan within the reformed 30-month plan making system.

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. There is a statutory duty under both the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, amendments made by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 (the 2026 Regulations) to prepare and adopt a Local Plan.
2. Following advice from the Planning Inspectorate, Cabinet (June 2025) agreed to withdraw the BCP Local Plan which had been prepared and submitted for examination in 2024, and prepare a new BCP Local Plan (the Plan). The new Plan will establish how land within our area will be used and developed, setting out priorities for housing, employment, infrastructure, and environmental issues. It will provide a clear, deliverable and legally compliant spatial strategy, site allocations and policy framework to guide development and infrastructure investment over a 15 year period from 2028/29 – 2043/44.

New Plan-making system

3. Government published guidance on the new plan making process in November 2025 and associated 2026 Regulations. Consultation on a proposed draft new National Planning Policy Framework was released in December 2025 and includes updates regarding the new system. The new system is a structured process with clear stages and 'gateways', there is a mandatory 30-month time limit from Gateway 1 to Adoption. The sequence of tasks are set out below.

Stage 1 Getting ready

Publish timetable (this must be updated at each key stage)	May 2026
Give notice to commence plan making (a minimum of 4 months before Gateway 1)	May 2026
Run a scoping consultation to set out what the plan should contain and how we intend to engage with stakeholders (minimum of 21 days)	June 2026
Complete Gateway 1 (self-assessment to ensure plan readiness)	Sept 2026

4. During this stage we must prepare a project initiation document (PID) that sets out our project management arrangements, gather baseline information and evidence, understand land availability and start to consider the plan vision.

Stage 2 Prepare the plan

Publish summary of scoping consultation feedback	Sept 2026
Consultation on the plan content and evidence (minimum 6 weeks; includes draft vision, proposed spatial strategy, summary of evidence and can include draft policies)	Oct -Nov 2026
Publish the plan content and evidence consultation summary	Feb 2027
Complete Gateway 2 (progress check with Planning Inspectorate to support resolution of potential soundness issues)	April-May 2027
Consultation on draft Local Plan (minimum of 8 weeks)	Sept-Nov 2027
Publish consultation summary	Jan 2028
Finalise the draft plan	Jan-Feb 2028
Gateway 3 (check with the Planning Inspectorate to ensure the plan meets the prescribed legal requirements to enable us to submit the plan for examination)	March-April 2028

Stage 3 Examination

Submit the plan for examination	May 2028
Examination	June-Nov 2028
Adoption	Dec 2028/Jan 2029

5. This report seeks authorisation to complete the Stage 1 (“Getting ready”) activities and to provide delegated authority to progress through Gateways 1–3 in accordance with the 30-month timetable. A Cabinet decision will still be required to approve each formal public consultation stage.

Project Initiation Document (PID)

6. The PID (appendix 1) needs to be read in conjunction with this report. It sets out the overall management framework, timetable and approach for delivering the Plan. It provides clarity on the project management arrangements, the plan's potential scope, governance arrangements (including a cross-party working group noted in Section 3 of the PID and the associated Terms of Reference attached in appendix 2), resources, timelines and the evidence required.
7. The PID is designed as a reference tool for officers, stakeholders, and councillors, ensuring everyone involved understands their roles and responsibilities throughout the plan-making process.

8. The PID follows the template published by the Planning Advisory Service. It is a live document which will be reviewed and updated at each key stage of plan making (before each Gateway stage) or every six months. It will also be updated if any other significant changes arise. Refining and updating the PID at each stage ensures it stays relevant and can reflect any changes whether those arise from new evidence, engagement insights or emerging risks.

Scoping consultation

9. As part of the new process authorities must run a scoping consultation to ask for views on the key issues, what to include in the local plan and how to engage with people going forward. Government guidance sets out we must seek the views of general and specific consultation bodies (defined in the regulations) and we will also seek the views of residents.
10. The consultation version of the National Planning Policy Framework is clear that the plan should not duplicate or modify policies in the Framework, and only address matters beyond site or location specific requirements where there is a clear and justified reason. It is clarified that policies should not seek to duplicate or extend controls imposed by separate regulatory regimes such as Building Regulations. This is explained in the proposed scoping consultation material, attached in appendix 3; this may be refined if further guidance is released.

Purpose

11. Once adopted, the Plan will serve as the principal basis for determining planning applications, directly shaping the future growth, development, and sustainability of our communities. It will allow us to:
 - Maintain control over the amount and location of housing and employment growth;
 - Allocate sites and areas for development, helping to provide housing for local people and supporting economic growth;
 - Set up-to-date standards for design quality, density, housing mix and affordable housing;
 - Secure infrastructure alongside growth – including schools, highways infrastructure, green spaces and health infrastructure;
 - Give certainty to our communities about where the most significant changes will take place;
 - Support the regeneration of our town centres and high streets;
 - Protect valuable habitats, species, recreation areas and important employment land; and
 - Direct development near to services and to support improved public transport.
12. To date work on the new Plan includes the collection of evidence, a call for sites exercise, and meetings with promoters of strategic sites. Early information sessions have been held with councillors, agents and developers and representatives from Neighbourhood Forums and Parish Councils.

13. The existing local plans and policies from the predecessor authorities are increasingly out of date, either due to age or lack of conformity with national policy. This has several consequences:

- Out-of-date policies carry reduced weight in decision-making, with a tilted balance in favour of allowing development, leading to unmanaged growth.
- Limited mechanisms for securing affordable housing on brownfield sites.
- Some previous site allocations do not reflect updated market conditions or aspirations for specific sites, including council owned regeneration sites.
- Limited policies in place to secure a mix of home sizes/types.
- Infrastructure planning is fragmented and reactive.
- Over 300 policies to consider for the public, developers and the Council.

Options Appraisal

14. The 2026 Regulations require authorities to give notice of their intention to commence plan making by 31 December 2026, followed by publication of their Gateway 1 self-assessment by 30 April 2027 (or by the time adopted plans are 4 years and 8 months old, whichever is later). In BCP, all adopted Local Plans are over 7 years old.

Option 1 commence plan making now - recommended

15. Commencing now enables the Council to progress through Stage 1 ("Getting ready") without delay and to bring forward an up-to-date Local Plan at the earliest opportunity, protecting the Council's position to manage the amount and location development, promote key sites and address infrastructure and design issues. This provides earlier clarity and will get a stronger policy framework in place sooner to manage development and support infrastructure planning.

16. If the Council issues the Notice to Commence in May 2026, it can proceed through Gateway 1 in September 2026 and work towards adoption in early 2029, in line with the 30-month process.

17. It is also recommended that delegated authority is provided to enable the Council to proceed through the Gateway stages. Without delegated authority, additional time would be required to secure Cabinet decisions at each stage and it may not be possible to complete the process within the required timeframe.

Option 2 Commence a Plan by 31 December

18. This option is to defer commencement until 31 December 2026 to commence plan making and continue evidence gathering in the meantime. The scoping consultation would need to take place promptly in early 2027 to avoid the pre election period in advance of local elections in May 2027. The Plan would not be adopted until the end of 2029, a year later than option 1.

19. During this period we would continue to rely on the predecessor authority Local Plans. Policies would become increasingly out of date and we would face increased exposure to unplanned/speculative development pressures, including on Green Belt sites.

Option 3 do nothing (Planning by appeal)

20. If we do not proceed with the preparation of a Local Plan we are in breach of our statutory duties, and with a risk of intervention by the Secretary of State, and the loss of control of plan making.
21. We would continue to determine applications primarily against the existing, and increasingly out of date, plan policies and national policy, with increased uncertainty and ongoing risk of development coming forward without the benefit of an up-to-date locally-specific strategy and policy framework.

Summary of financial implications

22. The preparation of the Local Plan requires the completion of a range of technical evidence. Some of this work is carried out in-house by Planning Policy Officers and some is carried out by external specialists. A budget of £251k a year has been previously agreed by Cabinet and is included with the MTFP. This is in addition to the staff budget.

Summary of legal implications

23. Government guidance advises that if are not intending to submit a plan under the existing system by 31 December 2026, the Council should begin plan-making in the new system as soon as possible to get an up-to-date plan in place. The 2026 Regulations set out dates for when you must start your plan as set out in the body of this report. These dates:
 - are the very latest a plan can legally be started
 - allow flexibility for the Council to start its plan earlier
24. The new local plan making system has reduced the plan-making time to a strict 30-month timetable. Government guidance further highlights the risks of non-compliance, whereby such failure carries the following risks of non-compliance
 - Intervention by Secretary of State: The Secretary of State retains powers to intervene if an authority fails to make progress or fails to meet the 30-month timetable.
 - Appointment of Commissioners: Independent Local Plan Commissioners may be appointed to take over plan-making duties from failing authorities.
 - Losing Appeals and costs: In the absence of an up-to-date local plan, councils are at higher risk of losing planning appeals, particularly due to the potential reintroduction of a five-year land supply pressure and a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" for new development.
 - Financial and Technical Risk: Failure to create a properly evidenced plan could lead to it being found unsound at Gateway 3 (see above) or at final examination.

Summary of human resources implications

25. The production of the Local Plan will be completed by the existing resource in the planning policy team. Continued input will be required from other council departments and communications and consultation support required at the consultation stages.

Summary of sustainability impact

26. At this stage agreeing the getting ready stages does not have a direct impact on sustainability. The final version of the Local Plan will have sustainability implications and the production of the Plan be assessed through Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Summary of public health implications

27. At this stage agreeing the getting ready stages does not have a direct impact on public health. The final version of the Local Plan will seek to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of the population. The production of the Plan will be assessed through a specific Health Impact Assessment.

Summary of equality implications

28. At this stage an EIA has not been completed, as the “getting ready” stage of plan making does not have direct equality implications. Future stages of plan making will be subject to EIA.

Summary of risk assessment

29. A detailed risk assessment is set out within the Project Initiation Document. The key risks with not progressing the Local Plan are: continued speculative development, government intervention and reduced planning service performance through the continued use of plans over five years old.

Background papers

Cabinet paper June 2025.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Project Initiation Document

Appendix 2 Local Plan Working Group Terms of Reference

Appendix 3 Scoping consultation report