

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting – 19 February 2024**OSC23/49. ROTHER DRAFT LOCAL PLAN REGULATION 18 DOCUMENT**

(4)

Members received the report of the Planning Policy Manager, the Rother Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 document and the Rother Local Development Scheme, ahead of their formal consideration by Cabinet on 4 March 2024. The new Rother Local Plan would be the spatial development plan that would set the strategic policies for the distribution and development of residential uses, employment and supporting infrastructure across the district. It would also be a key delivery tool for the objectives set in the Rother Corporate Plan.

The consultation version of the new Local Plan, attached at Appendix A to the report, was based around two overall priorities – Green to the Core and Live Well Locally. It set out a proposed Development Strategy and included a suite of proposed planning policies which would be used in the determination of planning applications. The consultation version would progress to Regulation 18 consultation for a 12-week period, in accordance with all legal and national policy requirements.

An up-to-date Local Plan for the district should have been in place to provide a vision for the future and address housing needs and other economic, social and environmental policies. The Council's current Core Strategy Local Plan was more than five years old, having been adopted in September 2014. The Council had committed to reviewing the Local Plan, to ensure a sufficient, continuous supply of housing land in July 2018, however, it had prioritised the completion of the Development and Site Allocations (DaSA) Plan and the production of Neighbourhood Plans. The DaSA was adopted in December 2019, by which time five Neighbourhood Plans had been made (adopted), two further plans had since been made and another was subject to a referendum in February 2024.

An Early Engagement Document was published in April 2021, outlining the Council's approach to how it would develop its new Local Plan. The adopted policies of the Core Strategy and the DaSA were reviewed; this review and compliance check set out that the policies required updating. The review also helped to identify the key issues that needed to be addressed in the new Local Plan.

An evidence base was also scoped as part of the Early Engagement Document and a significant number of documents, studies and reports had been completed to inform the new Local Plan's proposed development strategy and policies; these were detailed within the report.

The policy team had adopted an open and inclusive approach, liaising in different ways, including Call for Sites (2020-2024), meetings with neighbouring local planning authorities, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Highways, statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, parish and

town councils, internal cross-department officer working groups and a cross-party Councillor steering group.

The Planning Policy Manager outlined for Members the background to the Plan, its format in two parts, being the proposed policies and development plan and finally the next steps, all as detailed in the report.

There was a legal and national policy requirement to review the Plan and update where necessary, as well as a Council commitment to do so. It was important that public consultation took place on a well-developed draft Local Plan and that a genuine, collaborative process was undertaken. The Plan was at the right stage for that consultation process to commence.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- Members agreed that the draft Plan document was of great importance, had been subject to an extremely robust process, had been put together in a way that was easy to understand and paid tribute to the officer team;
- it was noted that only approximately one third of local authorities had an up-to-date local plan in place. Legislation was coming forward in due course which would offer enhanced protection for those authorities with an up-to-date plan, as it provided a stronger position with which to defend planning decisions;
- a revised local plan provided the opportunity to set housing targets which were right for the district;
- the current Housing and Employment Needs Assessment (HEDNA) document was dated 2020. It was confirmed that a new HEDNA that had been worked on jointly with Hastings Borough Council was about to be published, which recognised the changes that had taken place since 2020, and in particular the ever-growing affordability gap and older persons' requirements;
- the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) document reviewed sites across the district for development opportunities in the future. A minimum target for new housing in Rother to 2040 would need to be set and the HELAA 'left no stone unturned'. This would be published alongside the draft Plan;
- there were many issues that were out of the control of the Council, such as the number of residents in private rented accommodation, some of whom faced homelessness when rents were increased, and the increasing number of young people unable to move from their parents' home;
- a proportion of social housing was under-occupied;
- policy permitting, single or paired dwellings in settlements without development boundaries would provide market homes, therefore the Council could not stipulate that those individuals with local connections be given priority;
- legislation was due later in the year which could prevent, if conditioned by planning permission, new properties being used as

- second homes / short term rentals without planning permission (this would not be applied retrospectively);
- the proposed new policies were subject to consultation, but once submitted and adopted would be final;
 - there was currently no policy and very few development boundaries surrounding hamlets. Development boundaries and green gaps would enable them to remain separate from nearby villages or towns. 'Infilling' without development boundaries could bridge that gap. It was hoped that this would be explored further within the consultation process;
 - in order to ensure the Live Well Locally priority could be met, it would be essential to work with ESCC Highways on road networks and provision of cycle routes and pavements. ESCC had inputted to the Live Well Locally policies and, as one of the statutory consultees, the Council would continue to work with them closely;
 - it was important to embrace Government legislation and partnership working;
 - as much of the district was within the Area of Outstanding National Beauty, the Council must continue to protect it;
 - the Council continued to work closely with its neighbouring authorities and was proposing the same strategic gaps between settlements as were in place currently. Sites around the edges of Hastings were being considered and explored with their policy officers;
 - the HEDNA had considered the needs of the increased numbers of residents now working from home and advised that it was too early to provide evidence on how this affected housing need. Views would be sought within the consultation;
 - a new approach to studying settlements and their sustainability was detailed in an evidence base document which would sit alongside the draft Plan consultation and used metrics such as the level of services and facilities available and access to bus services;
 - an A21 corridor formed part of a long-term vision, beyond the 2040 plan period;
 - Members raised concerns that the development of the infrastructure to support new developments did not always run in tandem;
 - transport assessment had been undertaken looking at highway capacity and potential development in West Bexhill. This information would be published alongside the draft Plan;
 - the draft Plan provided opportunities for change and was aspirational. It was not the role of planning to address existing traffic management issues;
 - Members were encouraged to inform their parishes that the document would be published for consultation shortly;
 - Members requested that a simpler, shorter version for consultation be published alongside the draft Plan, or an A4 page detailing the main principles. Officers advised that the key issues would be focused on during roadshows and panels and that comments could be made on just certain sections of the consultation document, if preferred / required; and
 - Members were requested not to complete the consultation when published, as this was for the public, but to contact officers direct with their comments.

Members of the Committee were happy to recommend the Rother Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 document to Cabinet for approval and formal consultation and for the revised Rother Local Development Scheme to be approved and published alongside the Local Plan.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the Rother Draft Local Plan Regulation 18 document be recommended to Cabinet for approval and formal consultation;
- 2) the revised Rother Local Development Scheme be recommended to Cabinet for approval to be published alongside the Local Plan; and
- 3) the comments of Overview and Scrutiny Committee be considered by Cabinet.