Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that Cabinet recommends to Council that the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan “Issues and Options” document attached as appendix 1 to this report be approved for public consultation and published for an 8 week consultation period as soon as is practicable following the Full Council meeting of 10 December, along with supporting documents including the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment, subject to further minor changes to those documents to be agreed with the Leader prior to publication, provided that these do not change the overall direction, shape or emphasis of the documents, and do not raise any significant new issues.

Summary

The Council has a need to get a new Local Plan in place to provide a framework for guiding development in the Borough for the next twenty years. The purpose of this report is to present an “Issues and Options” consultation document and seek approval for it to be published for public comment.

Statutory Powers

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)
Planning Act 2008
Localism Act 2011
Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

Introduction

1. Cabinet will be aware that the 2011 – 2029 Eastleigh Borough Local Plan was not supported by the Planning Inspector at Examination. The Council now has a need to get a new Local Plan in place to provide a framework for guiding development in the Borough for the next twenty years.

2. The purpose of this report is to present an “Issues and Options” consultation document and seek approval for it to be published for public comment.
The New Local Plan

3. Cabinet will be aware that the new Local Plan is not starting from scratch. The previous Local Plan had a wide ranging evidence base, much of which is still relevant. The previous Plan went through four full consultations involving the public and relevant organisations, helping to set priorities such as the need for strategic gaps and deliver new infrastructure. Finally, much of the development which will take place in the Borough over the next 10-15 years will take place on sites which now have planning permission, but were originally envisaged and promoted as part of that previous Local Plan. This will form the baseline for the new document.

4. Nonetheless, there is a need for a new Local Plan to provide a framework up to 2036. This longer timeframe is necessary as it provides a sufficient long-term vision for the Borough, as well as dovetailing with the timeframe under which the emerging South Hampshire Strategy is being prepared by the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire (PUSH).

5. The review of the PUSH strategy is underway. The strategy will set out a broad approach to planning in south Hampshire and respond to the most recent projections of housing need. It will also consider the need for local authorities to work together to meet development needs under the statutory “duty to cooperate”. The intention is for the outcomes of that process to be taken into account in due course. However, the Borough Council cannot wait for this process to be complete before commencing work on its own plan. This would lead to further delays in the process, leading to continuing uncertainty for communities and weaken the Council’s ability to plan positively for the Borough’s future.

6. Therefore the Council has been undertaking work considering its own evidence base and development needs for the future. To inform this work, the Council published three technical evidence papers over the summer for comment. These concerned the latest projections of housing requirements, taking into account the most recent national household formation projections; a study of employment land requirements and an assessment of the needs for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. The level of consultation response was limited, but the outcomes of those consultations have informed officers’ thinking on those issues. All of those consultation questions are returned to in the proposed Issues and Options consultation document, to ensure all parties have their say.

7. The Local Plan, when finalised, will set out the vision and aims of the Council in delivering sustainable development. It will include policies to allocate land for development to meet identified needs as well as policies which address various themes. More specifically it will address:

- How much development is required (incl. housing & employment);
- How to protect our special habitats/species/historic landscapes;
• The future role of our town, village and local centres, as well as out-of-town retail;
• How to ensure we get the infrastructure needed in place;
• How to plan locally to deal with climate change;
• How to achieve high quality development that protect, enhances and creates a strong sense of identity for the Council’s communities; and
• Detailed policies to guide the above.

8. Cabinet will be aware that two parishes have secured designation as a neighbourhood planning area - Bishopstoke and Botley. Others may follow. The Local Plan will provide a framework for local communities preparing a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood plans set out a specific local vision for an area and planning policies for the use and development of land within it. In some cases, the production of both local and neighbourhood plans will occur concurrently. Officers will be working with representatives of those organisations bringing forward neighbourhood plans to do as much as possible to coordinate the production of evidence and undertaking of consultations.

Issues and Options Consultation

9. In October the Council approved a new Corporate Strategy to 2025. This sets out clear priorities for the Council, including tackling congestion, developing green infrastructure, ensuring an excellent environment for all and an increased provision of and a more diverse mix of housing. These objectives are shared in the Plan.

10. Under the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 the Council is required to consult on what a Local Plan ought to contain. The consultation document attached as Appendix 1 has been prepared as an “Issues and Options” consultation. This sets out the main planning issues facing the Borough, and provides a series of options. They can broadly be split into three areas:
• Options for total amount of development;
• Spatial options for broad areas to meet new development needs; and
• Options for how the detailed planning policies, covering issues such as the delivery of affordable housing, are developed.

11. The first key issue is how much development is required in the Borough? The consultation document sets out the most recent information on the likely levels of development required in the Borough to 2036. This includes housing, employment land, sites for travelling communities, and retail needs. However, the issue of the level of housing is of key interest, as it was the
reason the Government’s Planning Inspectorate failed to support the previous Local Plan.

12. As stated, work on the PUSH South Hampshire Strategy is underway. The timetable for that review is uncertain at this time. In any event it is important from this Council’s perspective that the final Local Plan is informed by a more comprehensive evidence base than simply relying on the PUSH Strategy. This allows the Council to consider all the evidence on the levels of development, including views put forward by the Borough’s communities, service providers, and development interests. Therefore, in relation to potential housing requirements, a series of ranges of levels of development are considered, to enable a full discussion of the issue.

13. The second key issue for the now Local Plan is where is development going to go? The spatial options section sets out various options for consideration and consultation with the public. Not all of the locations will need to be developed to achieve the levels of development required. None of the options are being recommended to Cabinet for development. The purpose of this consultation is to enable communities to have their say on the identified issues, costs and benefits of each option. Consulting at this early stage also enables infrastructure and service providers, such as the County Council, health organisations, environmental groups and utility companies the opportunity to feed into the process, to confirm where there is spare capacity in existing infrastructure, where there is not and where new infrastructure would need to be provided. The document asks for views on key locations, or a strategy of extending existing settlements. It also asks if the Council should be considering other locations.

14. The final key issue is how shall development be delivered? The policy options section of the document sets out options for the main areas of planning policy to be covered by the Local Plan. As discussed earlier, the new Local Plan builds upon work previously brought forward, in consultation with the community and statutory agencies, to cover policy areas such as the protection of designated sites for nature conservation and securing affordable housing from new development sites. For each issue the document briefly sets out a description of the main factors, and summarises the position taken in the previous 2011-29 Local Plan. Where there are genuine options for that policy, those are then set out and views sought. In some cases, there are not considered to be meaningful options open for the Local Plan. In those cases, a policy approach is highlighted, again with views sought.

15. The Issues and Options consultation will be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment document, as well as a number of background documents. A note which explains the Sustainability Appraisal process is available online as Appendix 2 to this report. The Habitats Regulations Assessment is available online as Appendix 3 to this report.

Consultation
16. Formal public engagement and consultation is a vital part of the planning process. The Council’s Statement of Community Involvement sets out how the Council will engage with the community on Local Plan documents. In accordance with this, the following measures are proposed to publicise the consultation:

(a) Publication on the Council’s website;

(b) Local press releases, and a formal notice in a local newspaper;

(c) Direct contact of all parties currently in the Planning Policy Consultation Database, at present over 4,000 individuals and organisations; and

(d) Specific contact of statutory bodies, including neighbouring authorities and all Parish and Town Councils.

17. In addition, paper copies of the main consultation materials – the Issues and Options consultation document, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment will be available at all the libraries in the Borough, and the Civic Offices. Copies will also be given to each local council for use by members of the public during the consultation period. Additional background papers, including new material and studies which were prepared as background to the previous Local Plan and considered still relevant, will be clearly indicated on the Council’s website.

18. It is proposed that the consultation will begin as soon as is practicable following the Council meeting of 10 December 2015, and will last for a period of eight weeks. This period runs over the Christmas break. However, it is noted that the statutory minimum for formal Plan consultations set out in regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 is six weeks. Therefore the consultation period is considered sufficient to enable all parties to have their say.

19. A series of consultation events, involving staffed exhibitions, will be held around the Borough to raise awareness of the consultation and provide interested parties with an opportunity to discuss the issues with officers. The intention is for those events to take place in January 2016, and once arrangements are finalised all details will be publicised in accordance with the proposals set out in paragraph 16 of this report.

20. Once the consultation responses have been received, the responses will be considered and reported to Cabinet prior to the Plan being progressed to the next stage.

Financial Implications

21. The publication and printing of the draft Local Plan and the exhibitions can be resourced from the budgets held by the Head of Regeneration and Planning Policy for this purpose. The Council has previously estimated that a budget of approximately £300,000 will be required for publication, submission and examination of the Local Plan. It is anticipated that this can be met by
budgets and reserves currently identified, but Cabinet will be updated as necessary. There are no other financial implications arising from this report.

Risk Assessment

22. The Government has made it clear that an increase in the level of new housebuilding is a priority. It is vital that the Council has an up to date Local Plan in place as soon as possible, alongside a five-year land supply, in order to avoid the risk of development proposals not in accordance with the Council’s preferred direction being submitted and approved on appeal. The Council has already received a number of such ‘hostile’ planning applications and more are believed to be pending.

Equality and Diversity Implications

23. The document attached to this report is an Issues and Options consultation draft to inform the preparation of the 2011-2036 Local Plan. Consultation will be extensive and wide-ranging and as a part of that process the Plan is being subject to a Sustainability Appraisal that addresses the social, economic and environmental impacts of the proposals. It is anticipated that this will ensure that the plan satisfactorily addresses equality and diversity implications. An Equalities Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan project and is available online as Appendix 4. It will continue to be revisited through the Local Plan process.

Conclusion

24. The consultation document is considered an appropriate mechanism by which the Council can engage with local communities, development interests and infrastructure and service providers in preparing the next Local Plan.

25. It is recommended that Cabinet recommends to Council that the Eastleigh Borough Local Plan “Issues and Options” document attached as appendix 1 to this report be approved for public consultation and published for an 8 week consultation period as soon as is practicable following the Full Council meeting of 10 December, along with supporting documents including the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment, subject to further minor changes to those documents to be agreed with the Leader prior to publication provided that these do not change the overall direction, shape or emphasis of the documents, and do not raise any significant new issues.

TOBY AYLING
PLANNING POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION MANAGER

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Appendices Attached: 4
*Report No

Eastleigh Borough Council
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

* List Background Papers or state None.