

Local Development Framework Panel		Agenda Item:
Meeting Date	28 March 2018	
Report Title	Looking Ahead – A local plan draft consultation and engagement document.	
Cabinet Member	Cllr Gerry Lewin, Cabinet Member for Planning	
SMT Lead	Emma Wiggins	
Head of Service	James Freeman	
Lead Officer	Gill Harris	
Key Decision	No	
Classification	Open	
Forward Plan	Reference number:	
Recommendations	1. That the Panel, subject to any further changes required, agrees to publish the document ‘Looking Ahead’ for consultation for a period of 6 weeks and, in consultation with the Chair, agree the separately available simplified questionnaire and poll..	

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 At February’s meeting the Panel noted and agreed that the Council would undertake some initial consultation and community engagement on the scope for the local plan review, drawing upon the work undertaken by the Council by consultants Peter Brett Associates.
- 1.2 Attached to this report at Appendix I is a draft (low-resolution) of a consultation document called ‘Looking Ahead’, which will be published at the end of April for 6 weeks. The document is intended to gather early opinions on a series of fairly high level issues that will inform the next Local Plan, in particular, the publication of a formal Issues and Options consultation document in Summer 2019. ‘Looking Ahead’ will be published separately from a ‘New Garden Communities Prospectus’ which is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.
- 1.3 The Panel is asked to agree the document for consultation, subject to any further changes it might agree.

2 Background

- 2.1 Following agreement by Panel Members in February to the initial stage of Local Plan consultation and engagement and the publication of the 'Choices for Housing Growth' document prepared for the Council by consultants Peter Brett Associates (PBA), the Panel is presented with the document that will form the basis of the first consultation and engagement.
- 2.2 Provisionally called 'Looking Ahead', the document is billed as an opportunity for early opinion gathering as a means for parties to give views about some of the big issues facing the Borough, whilst influencing the scope of the next Local Plan itself. It represents a precursor to an Issues and Options formal consultation stage which will be published in Summer 2019.
- 2.3 Although not a formal consultation stage, Looking Ahead is nevertheless considered an important opportunity given the considerable front loading of the timescale of the review, which needs to be completed by 2022.
- 2.4 The consultation document loosely draws upon the work undertaken by PBA in its document 'Choices for Housing Growth' (December 2017) and has reviewed the recently published changes to the NPPF and planning guidance. It has also taken into account, as far as is appropriate, the comments raised by Members at the last Panel and up until the post meeting deadline provided.
- 2.5 The draft can be found in Appendix I (low resolution) and is structured as follows:
 - Section 1: Why are we engaging with you now?
 - Section 2: How do I get involved?
 - Section 3: What happens after I respond to this document?
 - Section 4: What will the next local plan be covering?
 - Section 5: What are the stages in preparing the next local plan?
 - Section 6: What are the 'big picture' challenges facing us?
 - Section 7: What are the local challenges for Swale?
 - Sub-section 7.1: What are our Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
 - Sub-section 7.2: Where will we work?
 - Sub-section 7.3: Where will we live?
 - Sub-section 7.4: How we will get the services and infrastructure we need?
 - Sub-section 7.5: How will we adapt to the impacts of climate change?
 - Sub-section 7.6: How will we move around?
 - Sub-section 7.7: How will our environment be managed?
 - Section 8: Key questions and how should we take them forward?
 - Sub-section 8.1: Our local plan vision and settlement strategy

- Sub-section 8.2: What are the possible alternatives for future growth?
 - Sub-section 8.3: Should we consider new settlements?
 - Section 9: Do you have any other comments?
- 2.6 Under most of these headings, the document poses a series of questions for participants to use. Whilst heavily emphasising the early stage of plan preparation and Council thought, the opportunity is taken to canvass views on the potential locations for development, including new settlements and, specifically 'garden' settlements. Questions are also presented on the robustness of the current local plan settlement strategy and vision going forward.
- 2.7 As a separate process from the 'Looking Ahead' consultation, a separate report to the Panel on this agenda proposes the publication of a 'New Garden Communities Prospectus', intended to gauge the appetite from landowner and developers for major new settlements planned on 'garden' principles. Although currently a separate process from the Local Plan, once submissions are made and assessed, Members will be asked to consider whether any location(s) should form part of the Issues and Options consultation i.e. as one (or part of) of the potential spatial alternatives that will be presented as possible means for distributing development in the Borough. These alternatives are then subject to consultation and further assessment.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Appendix I is a pre-consultation version of 'Looking Ahead'. Members may wish to comment, propose and agree changes to the document prior to its publication (see below). The Panel is also asked to agree to the broad consultation arrangements (see below). The document is still subject to some design changes.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Panel can agree to make changes to the document as appropriate or agree to an entirely different form of document, although depending on its scope this may impact upon timescales for consultation and progress thereafter. The Panel could choose not to undertake any consultation and engagement at all at this stage', or take a different approach, perhaps preferring to wait to the Issues and Options stage in Summer 2019. This is not recommended because of the contracted timetable for the local plan review. Not to undertake engagement and consultation now could lead issues being raised later in the process that the Council could have had a chance to address earlier.
- 4.2 Undertaking consultation and engagement in a different way, e.g. more directly with community itself (e.g. workshops/exhibitions etc.), is not recommended. Communities will be able to engage both with the document and a proposed questionnaire (See 5.0), but at this early stage, with no specific proposals 'on the table', any more direct form of engagement (i.e. a workshop) is not considered likely to be fruitful. Specific events would be difficult to manage and are not

considered necessarily to be the best way to achieve representative feedback. A questionnaire opportunity is considered more appropriate.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 The detail of consultation arrangements are being worked up, in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, and under the following activities:

- The 'Looking Ahead' consultation has been trailed in the March edition of 'Inside Swale' that has gone to every household.
- The 'Looking Ahead' document will be published on or around 20 April for a 6 week consultation period with notifications to all on the Council's consultation portal, alongside general press releases, social media etc.
- Two briefing sessions to be held with Parish Council's prior to the consultation launch.
- Two further workshops to be held with statutory and non-statutory consultees and landowners and developers. The latter workshop is also likely to be combined with the launch of the 'New Garden Communities' Prospectus.
- At the April LDF Panel meeting, Members will also have an opportunity to work through the consultation questions.
- A simplified questionnaire, based on the main consultation document, which can either be completed and returned to the Council or filled out on line. The questionnaire will require respondents to rank their responses in terms of priorities. These can then be analysed. The questionnaire is currently being drafted and with the Panel's agreement, this will be signed off by the Panel Chair.

5.2 Members will be advised of the consultation outcomes, probably in October this year. As this is not a formal local plan consultation stage, it is envisaged that rather than use the usual individual comment and response format, officers will undertake broad analysis of the representations received to bring out key messages for Members to consider for the preparation of the Issues and Options consultation document.

5.3 In terms of future activity and the relationship of the Looking Ahead document with the 'New Garden Communities' Prospectus, the following activities are envisaged to ensure that these and relevant evidence comes together at the right time for key decisions:

- Independent technical assessment of new settlement submissions – August to October 2018.
- Member presentation from leading new settlement scheme promoters – September 2018.

- Panel to consider results of Looking Ahead consultation, the Strategic Land Availability Assessment and draft of new settlement independent assessment report – October 2018.
- Panel to establish scope of reasonable spatial alternatives and to indicate possible preferred option choice. This meeting will also indicate whether new settlements should be further progressed as spatial alternatives – November 2018.
- Panel receipt of Sustainability Appraisal of reasonable spatial alternatives to enable confirmation of initial preferred option – January 2019.
- Panel receipt of Issues and Options consultation document, indicative preferred option draft Local Plan and Sustainability Appraisal – May 2019.
- Consultation on Issues and Options and indicative preferred option Local Plan – July 2019.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Supports all Council's corporate priorities.
Financial, Resource and Property	Within the budget for plan preparation work.
Legal and Statutory	Will meet requirements for Councils to give stakeholders the opportunity for early engagement and influence on the content of the Local Plan Review.
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Sustainability	None identified at this stage.
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.

7 Appendices

Appendix I: Draft 'Looking Ahead' consultation document (low resolution).

8 Background Papers

None.