

Economy, Regeneration & Climate Change Scrutiny Committee
29th February 2024

Stockport Local Plan Update

1. Introduction.

1.1 Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change committee has received verbal updates of the Local Plan since the decision was taken in late 2022 to delay its preparation until the outcomes were known of the government's consultation on revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The government finally published an updated version of the NPPF in late 2023. At the scrutiny committee meeting on 18th January 2024 it was requested that a written update be brought to the next meeting. This report is that update, providing details of recent work undertaken and the timetable for work and progression of the plan going forward.

2. Work undertaken since NPPF publication.

Plan content

2.1 An initial task of reviewing the plan as previously drafted to identify where changes will be required has been completed by the core Local Plan team. This has identified not just changes required directly because of amendments to the NPPF but also other amendments that are required as a consequence of other material changes of circumstance whilst progression of the plan was paused pending clarity emerging from the government. Key within this is ensuring that policies reflect evolving caselaw and best practice from elsewhere, especially where other plans with similar policies have progressed through examination and/or are now being used to determine planning applications.

Supporting evidence

2.2 Paragraph 31 of the NPPF sets out that "the preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence." Since the updated NPPF was published a review has been undertaken of the evidence base to identify where existing supporting documents need updating. There are also areas of evidence which can only be prepared at later stages of the plan's progression, to support the final version which is submitted and then subject to an examination in public. The evidence position is in the process of being reviewed by the council's KC.

2.3 Key evidence that needs updating or preparing to inform the plan includes:

- Housing Needs Assessment (HNA). This is required to inform the council's wider remit in relation to housing provision. An update of the HNA is already underway and expected to be finalised in April.
- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This provides evidence of the likely supply of housing land over the next 5, 5-10 and

10-15 year periods. It is critical evidence to show how the target the Local Plan sets for the number of new homes can be delivered. An update will be prepared in-house with capacity support from external consultants. The update will need to be completed by November in time to inform the final, publication/submission version of the plan.

- Green Belt assessment and open space assessment. Whatever strategy the plan sets out for meeting future development needs it is necessary to understand the value of areas which are protected from development. Our current open space assessment was produced in 2017. Our evidence on the value of our Green Belt dates from 2016. It is necessary to undertake an appraisal of the impact of any changes on the ground since those dates so that our understanding of the value of land, as open space or Green Belt, is up-to-date. Both updates are in the process of being commissioned and will be required in at least draft form to support the regulation 18 consultation this coming summer.
- An economic impact appraisal may be required to support the final publication/submission version of the plan. This will help to demonstrate how its various provisions, taken as a whole, will support delivery of the objectives set out in the council's economic plan. If required, this will need to be completed by the end of November.
- An infrastructure delivery plan (IDP) is required to show how the critical infrastructure required to support the development proposed by the plan will be brought about. This has been commissioned from consultants who will work very closely with the various in-house teams and external providers responsible for different forms of infrastructure provision. The IDP will need to be completed by November in time to inform the final, publication/submission version of the plan.
- The final, publication/submission version of the plan will need to be subject to a "whole plan viability assessment." This will establish whether, taken as a whole, the various policy provisions of the plan are deliverable. It is critical to help ensure that requirements such as provision of affordable housing are set at a level which does not result in development being unviable.

Resourcing

- 2.4 Progressing the plan requires not just the planning expertise needed to create the plan content and ensure a robust evidence base is in place but also a wider wrap-around resource, to help project manage the process, lead on ensuring everything is in place to undertake consultation and to liaise with other parts of the council and partner organisations to ensure they are able to input at the appropriate times in the process. This wider resource was stood down during in December 2022, and is now reassembled to support progression of the plan.

3. Timetable.

3.1 On 29th January 2024 the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Housing approved an updated Local Development Scheme (LDS) which was subsequently published on 8th February. The LDS serves two purposes:

- (i) It provides the starting point for the local community to find out what the council's planning policies are for the area, by setting out all the documents that already form and supplement the Local Plan; and
- (ii) It sets out the programme for the preparation of new development plan documents, including timetables indicating when the various stages in the preparation of any particular document will be carried out.

3.2 The updated LDS can be found here: www.stockport.gov.uk/stockport-local-development-scheme

3.3 The LDS sets out the key stages in preparation of the Local Plan going forwards as follows. The required/intended approval process is included at each stage for the benefit of members.

Stage	Dates	Approval process / notes
Consultation on draft Local Plan (regulation 18 ¹)	July – August 2024 (6 weeks)	Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change Scrutiny committee: 10/06/2024 Cabinet: 25/06/2024 Council: 11/07/2024
Consultation on publication Local Plan (regulation 19)	March – April 2025 (6 weeks)	Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change Scrutiny committee: 23/01/2025 Cabinet: 04/02/2025 Council: February 2025 (will likely require extraordinary meeting)
Submission	By end of June 2025	No further decision required as submission is of the publication (regulation 19) Local Plan along with a schedule of the representations made during the period of consultation and copies of all supporting evidence/documentation.
Examination in public	Autumn/Winter 2025/2026	Precise dates would be agreed with the Planning Inspectorate in the lead up to and following submission.
Adoption	Mid 2026	Would require consideration by Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change Scrutiny committee and Cabinet prior to a final decision to adopt being made at a full council meeting. Mid 2026 is an estimate based on previous plan-making experience but assumes no significant delay during or arising from the examination process.

¹ Of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, see www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/767.

- 3.4 The updated timetable set out in the LDS is compressed as a direct consequence of the delayed publication of the NPPF and the need to ensure that the new Local Plan is submitted to make the June 2025 deadline. In order to undertake the necessary stages of the plan and governance it is effectively the only option available to the council. It is also important to note that this timeline is also driven by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 introducing a new process for making Local Plans, although full details of that new process will not be known until secondary legislation, expected in the autumn, is made. The tight timetable is driven principally by the government having announced their intention to bring about transitional arrangements which require plans made under the current system to be submitted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate no later than the end of June 2025.
- 3.5 Careful consideration has been given to whether we need to accommodate 2 periods of consultation or whether we might, alternatively, proceed directly to the regulation 19 stage. This has included conversations with the council's KC and with DLUHC. Whilst a considerable amount of consultation has been undertaken on the Local Plan (in 2017 and 2020) and a considerable amount is known about the views of the public and other stakeholders as a consequence of consultation on the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (between 2014 and 2020) prior to Stockport's withdrawal from the joint plan process, we have been clearly advised that because of the length of time that has passed it would be a significant risk to assume that the requirements of regulation 18 are already met. The timetable, consequently, allows for both a final round of consultation under regulation 18 as well as the subsequent required consultation at regulation 19; this is tight but the risk from not undertaking adequate consultation is considered greater than the risk arising from potentially missing the June 2025 submission deadline.
- 3.6 The regulation 18 consultation cannot commence sooner than July because of the work to be done and restrictions resulting from elections in May. Whilst the proposal for a regulation 19 consultation means that the plan would need to be approved by council in February 2025, there is a little scope for a later regulation 19 due to the requirement to submit by the end of June 2025.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none.

Anyone requiring further information should contact Richard Wood by emailing richard.wood@stockport.gov.uk