



Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	23 September 2020
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Dacorum Local Plan (2020 – 2038): Emerging Strategy for Growth (for consultation)
Contact:	Councillor Graham Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure Author/Responsible Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Doe – Assistant Director: Planning, Development and Regeneration • Alex Robinson – Strategic Planning Manager
Purpose of report:	To consult the Committee on the Dacorum Local Plan (2020 – 2038): Emerging Strategy (for consultation).
Recommendations	That the Committee informs Cabinet of its views on the Dacorum Local Plan (2020 – 2038): Emerging Strategy (for consultation).
Period for post policy/project review	This document is for consultation only and the content of the document will be updated having regard to the consultation responses received, and other considerations as appropriate. Once the final Local Plan is adopted, a review will be undertaken at least every 5 years.
Corporate Objectives:	The new Local Plan will help support the following objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clean, safe and enjoyable environment: e.g. including policies that seek to protect open spaces and other environmental assets in the Borough. • Building strong and vibrant communities: e.g. including policies to deliver a mix of uses and range of housing types and tenures integrated within new neighbourhoods. • Ensuring economic growth and prosperity: e.g. allocating land for economic growth and providing land for businesses to grow.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing good quality affordable homes: e.g. allocating land for new housing development and including policies requiring affordable housing to be delivered as part of new development.
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>None directly associated with this report.</p> <p><u>Value for money</u></p> <p>The Local Plan is being prepared in line with the approved budget. Spending is regularly monitored against forecast and any external consultants are appointed through a formal procurement process where cost and value for money considerations were reflected in the scoring criteria.</p>
'Value for money' implications	
Risk implications	<p>If the Council does not undertake a further Regulation 18 consultation, the Local Plan will be at increased risk of being found unsound at Examination.</p> <p>There would also be a further delay to the preparation of the new Local Plan and an increased risk that the Council will not be able to rely on its existing suite of planning documents when looking to refuse permission for inappropriate or poor quality development in the Borough.</p>
Community Impact Assessment	Will be provided for the 20th October 2020 Cabinet report.
Health and safety Implications	None arising from this report
Consultees:	<p>Officers from the following services have been consulted during the preparation of the Local Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development Management • Environmental Health • Environmental Services • Housing Development • Commercial Assets and Property Development • Community Partnerships • Local highway authority (HCC) • Corporate Director – Housing and Regeneration
Background papers:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Dacorum Local Plan (2020 – 2038): Emerging Strategy (for consultation). 2. Adopted Local Development Scheme (July 2020) 3. Cabinet Report: Dacorum Borough Council Local Development Scheme, April 2020 4. Cabinet Report: Dacorum Single Local Plan 2020-2036 and Review of the Local Development Scheme, June 2019

	<p>5. Adopted Core Strategy (September 2013)</p> <p>6. Adopted Site Allocations DPD (July 2017)</p> <p>7. Dacorum Borough Local Plan 1991 – 2011 (April 2004)</p>
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>LDS: Local Development Scheme</p> <p>SCI: Statement of Community Involvement</p> <p>DPD: Development Plan Document</p> <p>NPPF: National Planning Policy Framework</p> <p>PPG: Planning Practice Guidance</p> <p>CAONB: Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty</p> <p>SAC: Special Area of Conservation</p>

1. Introduction to this consultation

- 1.1. Dacorum Borough Council is preparing a new Local Plan for the period 2020 to 2038. Once adopted, it will replace the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted July 2017), the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (adopted September 2013) and those “saved” parts of the Dacorum Borough Local Plan (adopted May 2004). The Local Plan is being prepared in accordance with the Council’s Local Development Scheme (LDS) (adopted July 2020).
- 1.2. The document before this committee is the next stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan and has been prepared for public consultation under Regulation 18 of the Local Plan Regulations (England) 2004 (as amended). Regulation 18 still falls within the ‘plan preparation’ stage and therefore does not constitute a final or draft plan under Regulation 19. The document prepared for consultation sets out the Council’s emerging growth strategy and includes proposals for new housing, employment and retail development across the Borough and the need for key infrastructure.
- 1.3. The consultation is an opportunity for the local community, other stakeholders and developers to provide feedback on the proposals in the document, the supporting evidence and to advise on changes that should be made prior to the Plan being finalised for the later examination process.
- 1.4. The proposed draft Regulation 18 Dacorum Local Plan, Emerging Strategy, for consultation is at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Background

- 2.1. Once adopted, the Local Plan will guide new development across the Borough, ensuring it takes place in the areas where the Council wishes development to take place and where infrastructure is being planned so that development and infrastructure delivery is coordinated. It is also a key tool in delivering our priorities set out in other plans and strategies, including the Corporate Plan (2020 – 2025) and the Dacorum Growth and Infrastructure Strategy (2019).
- 2.2. A new Plan is required because the existing Core Strategy (adopted in 2013) and the ‘saved’ policies from the Dacorum Borough Local Plan (adopted in 2004) are more than five years old and the weight we can give the policies in these documents is reducing as time goes by. In addition, the Core Strategy Inspector did identify that a wholesale review of the Plan would be required. The approach is now to provide a

new Single Local Plan providing a new strategy for development, new site allocations and policies to deal with development to 2038. Members will note that the Site Allocations Development Plan Document was adopted in 2017, but to provide detail on key sites pursuant to the Core Strategy of 2013.

- 2.3. There have been a number of changes to the planning system since these documents were adopted and it is important that we have a Local Plan in place which reflects national policy and guidance, otherwise the Council risks the potential loss over decision making.

3. What has informed the preparation of this consultation document

- 3.1. In November 2017 the Council published the Issues and Options (Regulation 18) consultation seeking comments on the key issues facing the Borough. We received more than 22,000 responses to this from over 2,000 individuals and organisations.

- 3.2. Since this time, there have been a number of changes to the planning system, including revised housing figures and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the supporting Planning Policy Guidance (PPG). In response to these changes we have undertaken an extended period of plan development, this includes updating our evidence base to better understand the needs and constraints in the Borough; these have informed the development of the Plan. We have also been through a process of generating and testing options for development as well as seeking the input with statutory bodies, such as the County Council, adjoining authorities and developers promoting land across the Borough.

- 3.3. The Local Plan needs to be prepared in accordance with current Government guidance. To be found "sound" the Local Plan needs to comply with the NPPF, specifically paragraph 35, which requires Plans to be:

- **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework.

- 3.4. Dacorum is a very constrained area with significant amounts of the Borough in the Green Belt and/or included as part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (CAONB). Dacorum is also home to parts of the Chilterns Beechwood Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which has international protection. These are significant constraints which influence the locations for new development in the Borough.

- 3.5. The preparation of the Plan involved the reviewing and testing of a range of growth options and scenarios. Alternative options were developed and presented early in the preparation stage of the Plan and developed and refined over time as evidence

emerged. It was also subject to further testing and targeted engagement to develop the growth strategy contained in the consultation document. The growth strategy has also been informed by a number of iterations of the Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment to assess emerging proposals against a number of economic, social and environmental objectives and to identify what measures could be included to offset adverse impacts.

- 3.6. The Plan is being subjected to an Appropriate Assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) which considers (amongst other things) the impact of the Plan on the Chilterns Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) taking into account any further mitigation that may be required in the Plan.
- 3.7. The growth strategy has also been supported by separate work on infrastructure delivery. This has helped inform decisions on where growth can be accommodated or not. Evidence gathering on infrastructure is ongoing and will continue up to the point at which the Local Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in the form of a comprehensive Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 3.8. Officers have been working with the Member Local Plan Task and Finish Group over the last 18 months on the development of the consultation document.

4. Proposed Reforms to the Planning System

- 4.1. The Government has consulted on a range of major reforms to the planning system in its Planning White Paper and related matters. Members should be mindful that if taken forward these will have a fundamental impact on the plan-making process as we move to the new system and potentially the nature and content of the draft Plan over the coming years. While this does introduce uncertainties including awaited details of transitional arrangements, Officers have, in the interim, incorporated a number of these key approaches in advance of this, where considered reasonable. This will ensure the Plan is better placed to respond to these reforms and to avoid later significant adjustments to its content, style and coverage.
- 4.2. In particular, Officers have incorporated into the Plan the housing figure derived from the Government's proposed changes to the standard method for assessing housing need, which is also at consultation in addition to the Planning White Paper. This provides Dacorum with an initial figure of 922 homes per annum. The standard methodology will, in due course, also factor in other land constraints and this may mean that the housing figure in the Plan may be subject to future review.

5. The Main Provisions of the consultation document

- 5.1. The Council has set out to develop a strategy which, as far as possible, accommodates its objectively assessed development needs. For housing, based on the most up to date information provided by Government, this constitutes 922 dwellings per annum, or 16,596 homes over the Plan period. The Council has made provision for 16,865 dwellings to provide a buffer. For employment the emerging growth strategy proposes 116,500 sqm of additional employment (industrial) space to be provided across the Borough.
- 5.2. Given the scale of growth required and the lack of realistic options, amongst other factors, the Council has concluded that exceptional circumstance exist to require the release of Green Belt land around settlements to meet future development needs.

- 5.3. The growth strategy set out in the consultation proposes growth in all of the major towns and large villages in the Borough. Hemel Hempstead continues to be the focus of the majority of this growth (10,650 dwellings), with Berkhamsted (2,230 dwellings) and Tring (2,730 dwellings) also included. Growth at Bovington (240 dwellings), Kings Langley (274) and Markyate (215) provide the majority of the remaining development with a further 500 dwellings coming forward elsewhere in the Borough over the 18 year period of the Plan. Approximately 50% of total growth will be provided in the existing built up areas (including on previously developed land) and through existing commitments and other existing allocations. The remaining growth will be within the Green Belt on the edge of existing settlements.
- 5.4. In addition to the growth outlined above, the growth strategy removes further land from the Green Belt around Hemel Hempstead to meet longer term development needs. This land could deliver a further 4,000 homes but is not earmarked to come forward until after 2038.
- 5.5. The consultation document sets out the locations for the Green Belt development across the Borough. The Green Belt releases around Hemel Hempstead are to be provided to the north and north east of the town. Green Belt releases at Berkhamsted are to be located to the south and to the west of the town with releases at Tring to the east and south east of the town. Smaller scale release are proposed to the south of Berkhamsted, to the east of Kings Langley and to the south of Markyate.
- 5.6. In addition to the proposed housing sites the consultation document proposes a number of employment sites. These are largely focused in and around Hemel Hempstead but do include extensions to Bourne End Industrial Estate and as part of the development to the south east of Tring.

6. The Duty to Cooperate

- 6.1. The Council has been working with nearby authorities and other organisations under the requirements of the Duty to Cooperate. These discussions focus on strategic matters that affect more than one authority and include unmet housing, employment and infrastructure needs across the South West Herts Authorities. Engagement is ongoing but substantial alignment has been reached many organisations on most issues. As such, the Council has started to prepare Statements of Common Ground / Memorandum of Understanding with these organisations, which have in turn informed the consultation document.
- 6.2. The Council has also contacted nearby authorities outlining the scale of growth that needs to be accommodated and seeking assistance to meet needs. The Council has been advised that other authorities are facing substantial growth challenges of their own and are unlikely to be able to assist Dacorum, particularly in the case of housing. On employment there is an acceptance that land to the east of Hemel Hempstead, in St. Albans District, can contribute to meeting wider South West Herts needs, including Dacorum's needs.
- 6.3. Members will be aware that the Duty to Cooperate is an ongoing process but the Council will need to demonstrate it has satisfied the legal requirements by the time the Local Plan is submitted for Examination as the Duty cannot be addressed after submission. This point was further illustrated by the Inspectors presiding over the St. Albans Local Plan.
- 6.4. Discussions will continue alongside the preparation of the Local Plan with the conclusions of discussions needing to be incorporated into the final Local Plan.

7. Structure of the Consultation Document

7.1. The Local Plan also contains planning policies covering a range of subjects from affordable housing, design, climate change and the environment.

7.2. The consultation document is structured as follows:

- **Vision, Strategic Objectives and Development Strategy** – this sets out the overarching aims of the Local Plan including responding to climate change, safeguarding the natural and built environment and reducing carbon emissions alongside the overarching development strategy for housing, employment, retail and infrastructure.
- **Guiding Development** – this section contains a number of our planning policies to influence development across the Borough. These are split into relevant sections which deal with housing, economic development, retail, climate change and sustainability, environment and biodiversity, managing development in the countryside, delivering great places, sustainable transport and connectivity, and healthy communities.
- **Delivery Strategies** – this section focuses on Dacorum's places and how these will change over the period.
- **Proposals and Sites** - this section contains site specific policies for each of the key growth and renewal areas identified in the delivery strategies.

8. The consultation

8.1. The consultation would commence in November and run for 8 weeks. This is two weeks longer than what we have stipulated in the SCI and takes into account the fact that the consultation period would have closed over the Christmas period. It also provides additional time for residents to engage in the process given the current COVID-19 restrictions. Officers will be undertaking substantially more online engagement throughout the consultation given that large public gatherings are not advisable.

8.2. Once the consultation closes we will carefully consider all responses received before considering what changes to make to the Plan. These comments, together with our response, will be made public after the consultation has closed.

8.3. Officers will continue to develop the evidence base underpinning the Plan and take into account the findings from these. This includes the work underway on the Appropriate Assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the outcome of the ongoing development of the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and the whole Plan viability assessment.

8.4. The Council will consider these issues (and others as appropriate) in finalising the Plan and publishing this under Regulation 19 before being submitted to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public. This may include changes to specific policies or sites that are currently included in the Plan.

- 8.5. We will also continue with discussions under the Duty to Cooperate to ensure that we have discharged our obligations appropriately and the conclusions from our engagement are reflected in the Draft Plan.
- 8.6. Before finalising the Plan we will need to consider any changes to legislation and/or Government guidance arising from the recently published Planning White Paper consultation and the other changes announced.

9. Next Steps

- 9.1. At their meeting on 18 October 2020, Cabinet will consider any requests that this Committee may make to amend the document prior to the consultation. Officers will advise Cabinet on whether the changes are such that further work will be need to be undertaken prior to the consultation taking place.