

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Paul Claussen: Executive Member for Planning

To: Cabinet: 22 March 2021

Author: Simon Wood: Director of Planning and Building Control

Subject: Local Plan Review: Budget carry over Request

Purpose: To request that the remaining underspend held in the forward planning – local plan production (154 0000 000 4410) heading for 2020/21 be carried over to 2021/22 for use in the preparation of the new Local Plan.

Recommendation(s):

- 1) That the underspend of £73,670 in the forward planning – local plan production (154 0000 000 4410) from 2020/21 be carried over into the same budget for 2021/22

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Breckland Local Plan was adopted in November 2019. The Council is required to maintain an up-to-date local plan, and this requires plans to be reviewed at least every 5 years. In June 2020, the Council approved a Local Development Scheme for the review of the Local Plan.
- 1.2 For some time, the Government has been signalling its intention to make radical changes to the planning system in England. The Covid-19 pandemic brought about some immediate changes to certain aspects of planning policy – such as enabling pubs to offer hot food takeaway services – while other, substantial changes to the planning system, were published for consultation on 6 August 2020 through the White Paper Planning for the Future. The Government also proposed some changes to the current planning system, including a review on the methodology underpinning the standardised housing figures and launched a concurrent consultation about that.
- 1.3 As a result of these consultations Breckland resolved to pause work on the review of the Local Plan until there was greater certainty on the Plan making process and in particular on the housing figures. The Council did not want to embark on potentially expensive and abortive work on the review as the Review would not have progressed to a sufficiently advanced stage by the introduction of any reforms (suggested to be November 2021) that would have been triggered under any transitional arrangements.
- 1.4 In January 2021 the Council received confirmation from MHCLG indicating that the Government continues to consider the proposed reforms to the planning system and reiterated its commitment to work with those remaining local planning authorities to secure an adopted local plan and that it is essential that plans are kept up to date. Critically, the Government also highlighted the recent publication of the changes to the methodology for assessing Local Housing Need and the outcome of its consultation on the standard method for calculating housing need. This produced a figure of 661 dwellings per annum for Breckland District. This is up from the previous figure, on which the current Local Plan was based, of 612 dwellings per annum.

- 1.5 The preparation of the Local Plan for Breckland is an on-going and complex process. The level of expert evidence that is required to support the emerging Local Plan is significant. This is unlikely to change. The guidance on exactly what this should cover continues to evolve in light of the National Planning Policy Framework and its associated Guidance, and emerging Inspector's Reports into other Local Plan Examinations around the country and its timing will need to reflect changes to the Planning system as they emerge over the forthcoming months. Much of the evidence and support needed requires expert knowledge on specific topics, and therefore necessitates commissioning external consultants with the requisite expertise and experience.
- 1.6 There is a need to review all the evidence the Council has prepared over time and undertake technical assessments that will allow Members to make the final decisions on the plan's content. The Government has made clear their expectation that all local planning authorities should continue to have an up-to-date Plan in place and It is clear that the Council needs to make good progress on the Plan this year.
- 1.7 The preparation of a Local Plan is an expensive area of work. As well as the production of the evidence base, there will need to be a commitment to resource the production of the Plan, consultation, legal support and costs associated with the examination. The budget allocated for 2020/21 was related to the review and completion of the evidence work as outlined above. The delay to the Plan has resulted in £73, 670 not being spent. However, this remains a key requirement in the production of the Plan.
- 1.8 There are a number of key areas where bespoke evidence will be required as part of the review of the Local Plan. These include:
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment
 - Gypsy and Traveller Assessment Update
 - Local Housing Technical Standards Study
 - Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (update)
 - Water Cycle Study (update)
 - Design Landscape Character and Green Infrastructure Audit
 - Brecks Landscape Character Assessment (update)
 - Local Architecture Character Assessment
 - Open Space and playing pitch Assessment (update)
 - Retail Study Update
 - Viability (whole plan and individual allocations)
 - Renewable and low carbon Study
 - Transport modelling of options/ schemes (Dereham and maybe others depending on preferred allocations)
 - Infrastructure Delivery Plan
 - Dereham Open Space Review
- 1.9 These will need to be completed within years 2021/22 and 2022/23. Therefore, the funding for these is an essential part of the plan making process that will be assisted by the carry-over of the budget.
- 2.0 **OPTIONS**
- 2.1 To agree to the recommendation. This would allow the Council to commence critical work on the review of the Local Plan.
- 2.2 Not to agree to the carry over of the budget. (Do Nothing). This would mean that some of the evidence required for the review of the Local Plan would not be completed and would

result in work on the new Plan being delayed until the required evidence base was resourced and completed.

3.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 The Preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory requirement. Plans must be underpinned by an appropriate evidence base, much of which is required at an early stage of the preparation process in order to inform future decisions over development strategies and allocations.

4.0 EXPECTED BENEFITS

4.1 An up to date Local Plan helps the Council to shape where developments can take place in the District to maximise environmental benefits and ensure the provision of appropriate transport links, provide for a variety of homes to meet local needs, built to an appropriate standard, create policies that address the causes and potential impacts of climate change, and the improvement of biodiversity, inform providers of infrastructure the types of infrastructure and community facilities to benefit both existing and new residents, and support new and growing businesses so that people can work locally to minimise commuting.

4.2 If the Council does not have an up-to-date Local Plan, development will still take place. However, we will not be able to use our own planning policies to help decide where development should go, and will be less able to require the schools, open space and road upgrades that are needed to support development.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

In preparing this report, the report author has considered the likely implications of the decision - particularly in terms of Carbon Footprint / Environmental Issues; Constitutional & Legal; Contracts; Corporate Priorities; Crime & Disorder; Data Protection; Equality & Diversity/Human Rights; Financial; Health & Wellbeing; Reputation; Risk Management; Safeguarding; Staffing; Stakeholders/Consultation/Timescales; Other. Where the report author considers that there may be implications under one or more of these headings, these are identified below.

5.2 Corporate Priorities

5.2.1 Publication of the BLR aligns with the following corporate priorities in the Breckland Corporate Plan 2020–2023.

- To deliver substantial and continued growth as proposed through our Local Plan, in conjunction with our key partners.
- Enable the effective planning and delivery of housing solutions to meet local needs and aspirations to ensure that our residents including veterans have access to a range of housing options in the district.

6.0 WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED

6.1 All

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Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No

This report refers to a Mandatory Service.