

# New Local Plan Update



## National Picture

At Full Council in October 2022, it was agreed to prepare a new local plan to succeed the existing, which runs to 2027. It was reported at that time that preparation of a new local plan would not be straightforward but that it was hoped a new one could be in place in 2027 to insure against any void period between the end of the existing plan period and the start of the next.

Unfortunately, as reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October last year, any hopes of having a plan adopted in 2027 were dashed by the Government's Local Plan Reforms which imposed a deadline for any older style plans to be submitted by the 30th June 2025. Given the evidence gathering and consultation necessary for any local plan, submission by this date was never a realistic option, meaning that the new local plan would have to follow the revised format for new-style local plans.

As reported, this will herald new national development management policies for matters which the government considers does not require policy at the local level. This means that these could not feature in the next local plan but there is no detail yet as to what areas the new national development management policies will cover.

More critically however in progression of the new local plan is the requirement for new style plans to have an environmental outcomes basis for relevant evidence. This would potentially impact some of the most fundamental and comprehensive documents including Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environment Impact Assessment. As reported in October 2023 there remains no policy or guidance relating to the move to environmental outcomes style of reporting which is still anticipated to be released in Autumn of this year when further information on new-style plan requirements is also expected. Until this time however, there remains an absence of Government direction for the preparation of new-style plans, delaying their progress.

We previously reported that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had been contacted to provide advice on authorities caught in this policy limbo and are awaiting a response. We also reported that we would seek to be one of the pathfinder authorities to test the new style local plan system, but await any confirmation of this.

This issue has contributed to 2023 seeing the fewest local plans published and adopted in more than a decade, since before the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework or NPPF in 2012.

In December 2023 the much-awaited revision to the NPPF was published. This wait was also part of the reason for the failure in new plan consultations or adoptions last year. The new Framework does not provide the aforementioned guidance on new-style local plans but does expand on a Written Ministerial Statement of a year earlier, regarding whether or not local authorities are required to review and alter green belt boundaries, if building on green belt land would be the only way of meeting housing need. The new plan will be prepared in accordance with guidance contained within the latest 2023 NPPF but with the significant potential for further policy changes as the plan progresses.

### **RBBC Local Plan**

In terms of progress with the new plan since October, there are several matters on which we can provide an update.

Firstly, we have been working with Icenl to progress the housing needs assessment to provide evidence regarding the overall need for housing in the Borough and the need for different types of homes including affordable housing and specialist housing for older people. We will be building on this by gathering evidence on the impact of AirBandB type accommodation and discussing the findings with other authorities in our shared Housing market Area.

We have been working with Lichfields to complete a retail and leisure study which is nearing its final stage and is to provide commentary on the impacts of trends in the retail industry, including the impacts of online shopping and changes to the use classes order; identification of retail and leisure catchments for each town centre, together with an assessment of market shares and local household spending patterns; recommendations as to whether future growth should pursue constant or enhanced market share (across the Borough and for individual centres); quantitative and qualitative assessment of additional retail floorspace need; assessment of the need for different types of leisure provision; and assessment of the health of the four main centres, utilising the Council's own annual town centre monitoring data. This will help inform the future of our centres, as well as having potential to support an Article 4 Direction to protect local shopping parades.

We have started work on our Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment which has involved agreeing the methodology for the consideration of sites and the

development of an online reporting form with our Business Development Team to enable easier submissions and reporting procedures.

We have also been working with the County Highway Authority to produce a first draft Regulation 18 Transport Assessment but with congestion, rail station usage, cyclist numbers and road noise still to be assessed.

Finally, it is worth noting the progress made on the Great Street A23 Design Code Draft SPD, which has undergone public consultation, given that design codes have a heavy reference within the latest NPPF as being a clear expectation within the framework of documents supporting new local plans.

The team has also been busy preparing the various reports associated with the Core Strategy Review and Statement of Community Involvement to be reported to Executive and Full Council later this month. With the Core Strategy Review being a statutory requirement with a fixed deadline and significant implications for our planning application decision making, this has of course been a priority. It is also worth noting the heavy involvement that has been required of Officers within the team in responding to the Gatwick Airport Development Consent Order (DCO), where examination hearings are currently underway. Thankfully the DCO process is expected to finish by September 2024 which should hopefully coincide with the publication of the much-needed guidance on new style local plan requirements, enabling further aspects of the new local plan evidence gathering to be started or progressed. This is reflected in the indicative timetable reported to Overview and Scrutiny back in October 2023, which we are still on track with, and which is being reported to Council later in the month to support the Core Strategy Review.