Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update of issues impacting on the progression of the Local Plan and consider a way forward.

Attachment
None

1.0 Background

1.1 A report on the progress of the Local Plan was considered at the last meeting of this Committee, where a revised timetable for its delivery was agreed. Following recent events in respect of the hearing into the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan this report considers the way forward to ensure that timetable is met.

2.0 Local Plan Progression and recent events

2.1 A number of issues are currently being progressed, or are subject to consideration, and will need to be resolved to enable the Local Plan to be taken forward in line with the revised Local Development Scheme timetable, which was agreed at the meeting of the September 30th 2019 meeting of this Committee.

2.2 Those issues can be summarised as follows:
- The need to address the outstanding representations and proposed housing allocations for Oundle
- The need to consider the potential shortfall in meeting the District’s overall housing requirements within the Plan period
- The need to consult on any significant changes to the Local Plan, if required, in advance of submitting the Plan for examination.

Addressing Outstanding representations

2.3 At the Planning Policy Committee held on 29 July 2019, Members resolved to defer the endorsement of the proposed housing site allocations for Oundle and to defer officer responses to the relevant Local Plan representations until the outcome of the examination of the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan is known.

2.4 Since that meeting a public hearing has been held for the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan (on 29th October 2019) and the examiners interim report is imminent (a verbal update of which will be provided at this meeting if available).

2.5 The public hearing raised fundamental issues regarding the legality of the Neighbourhood Plan. At the conclusion of the hearing the examiner indicated that he would publish a report in due course that was likely to reach a conclusion that the Plan could not progress in its current state. He advised that the options were likely to be a withdrawal of the Plan, or that it be put back to Regulation 14 for further consultation, with clear evidence provided to justify the approach to its housing site selection.
2.6 It is estimated that the outcome of the hearing is likely to delay the production of the Neighbourhood Plan by a considerable length of time (6-8 months minimum), it is also not clear when a final report will be issued by the examiner, although that may depend on the response to the report agreed by Oundle Town Council.

2.7 This delay will impact on the ability to deliver an adopted Local Plan in advance of the potential Unitary status which is programmed to occur on 1 April 2021. Further, given the uncertainty of whether, and how, the Neighbourhood Plan will progress following the issue of the examiners interim report, the Committee is asked to reconsider its position in respect of putting the Local Plan on hold in advance of outcome of the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan.

2.8 Depending on the views of the Members, a report could be brought to Committee early in the new year to consider the representations submitted in respect of the Oundle representations and clear direction be provided in respect of endorsing the proposed housing allocations for the town, which would allow the Local Plan to progress in line with the agreed timetable.

2.9 In addition, Members will be aware that planning applications for 2 of the 3 proposed draft Local Plan housing allocations were submitted to the Planning Management Committee on 13th November 2019 (namely Cotterstock Road and St Christopher's Drive). Whilst both applications were deferred, their determination would be required well in advance of any potential for the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan being made. Officer advice reported no fundamental issues in relation to the policy aspect of the applications; the planning applications were, however, deferred in respect of technical considerations, though the policy position was considered as open by that Committee.

**Considering the potential of a shortfall in meeting housing requirements**

2.10 This issue is subject to a separate report on the agenda, following work undertaken by officers as previously agreed.

**Consultation on potential changes to the Local Plan**

2.11 Again this is dealt with in the report referred to in paragraph 2.10. The potential for undertaking public consultation has been built into the revised Local Development Scheme, and could take place in early 2020, depending on the deliberations of this Committee.

3.0 **Conclusions**

3.1 In order to provide a clear steer for the Local Plan, to allow it to progress to submission, the Committee is asked reconsider its position in respect of placing the Local Plan on hold. The implications of that decision did not envisage a lengthy delay to the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan, which may ultimately result in the Local Plan not being adopted during the lifetime of the current council.

4.0 **Equality and Diversity Implications**

4.1 The preparation of the Local Plan Part 2 requires an Equality Impact Assessment to fully consider the impact of its policy proposals and land use allocations. This will be submitted to the Secretary of State as part of the evidence base for the Local Plan examination.
5.0 Privacy Impact Implications

5.1 All representations submitted to the draft Local Plan Part 2, through public consultation will be redacted to ensure any personal details are removed in advance of publication on the council’s website.

6.0 Health Impact Assessments

6.1 A health impact assessment has not been carried out. The impact on health and wellbeing is considered as part of the sustainable appraisal assessment of plan policy which supports the emerging Local Plan.

7.0 Legal Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from the proposals.

8.0 Risk Management

8.1 The main risks in preparing the Local Plan Part 2 are:

- Maintaining progress to ensure that key stages are met to enable the Plan to proceed as efficiently as possible to examination and adoption
- Ensuring the availability of sufficient resources to allow the preparation process to proceed in line with the Local Development Scheme.
- Ensure that the Plan satisfies the tests of examination, namely that significant changes provide the opportunity for public consultation and that the Plan has been positively prepared is justified, effective and is consistent with national policy.

9.0 Resource and Financial Implications

9.1 In addition to staffing costs, the main costs in the preparation of the Plan relate to the completion of the evidence base and funding the independent examination process, which is undertaken by the Planning Inspectorate and supported by a programme officer.

9.2 The cost of producing the evidence base is covered by existing budget. Provision of approximately £75,000 - £100,000 is now expected to be required in the financial year 2020/21 for the cost of the examination process. An estimate for this was factored into the 2019/20 budget, as approved by council on 4th March 2019.

10.0 Constitutional Implications

10.1 None arising from this report.

11.0 Implications for our Customers

11.1 The adoption of the Plan will ensure that the council will have a clear up to date statutory planning policy framework to inform decisions on future planning applications, which take account of the needs of local communities, particularly in respect of addressing housing, employment and community infrastructure needs. It would also help improve the quality of future planning permissions by ensuring that planning policies reflect both national guidance and reflect local aspirations.
12.0 Corporate Outcomes

12.1 The adoption of the Local Plan will, in particular, deliver the following Corporate Plan objectives:

- Good Quality of Life – Maintenance or enhancement of health and wellbeing through sustainable development through, for example, adopting policies relating to green infrastructure and design.
- Effective Partnership Working – The Plan preparation involves close partnership working with a wide variety of stakeholders, including public consultation, to inform policy development.
- Effective Management – Fulfilling legal requirements and maximising the effectiveness of the planning service

13.0 Recommendation

13.1 The Committee is recommended to:

1. Reconsider its decision to place the Local Plan on hold, which was agreed pending the outcome of the Oundle Neighbourhood Plan examination, so that it may progress in line with the Local Plan timetable

2. Agree that officers prepare a report to consider the outstanding Local Plan representations and draft housing allocations for Oundle early in the New Year.

(Reason - To allow the progression of the Local Plan in line with the timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme)