

March 2023**Northampton Part 2 Plan**

Following consultation on Further Main Modifications late last year, the Inspector's Report on the Local Plan has been received. This concludes that the plan can be adopted subject to modifications.

At the Planning Policy Committee held on 28th February Members were briefed on the proposed modifications. Members resolved to recommend to Full Council that the plan be adopted and Members will have seen the relevant papers on the agenda for this evening's meeting.

Should Members resolve to adopt the Part 2 Plan, there will be a full suite of adopted development plans in place for West Northamptonshire.

West Northamptonshire Local Plan

Work is progressing on preparing the new Local Plan for West Northamptonshire.

When work started on a new plan to replace the Core Strategy the intention was to produce a Strategic Plan that would be followed by Part 2 plans.

Taking account of government guidance and further discussion with PAS and the DLUHC Local Plans team, it is now proposed to produce one single plan. This will contain both high level strategy and more detailed policies. Because of this widened scope, the document is now referred to as the West Northamptonshire Local Plan, which better reflects its remit.

A report setting out the new timetable for the preparation of the West Northamptonshire Local Plan, known as the Local Development Scheme, is to be considered by Planning Policy Committee on 28th March.

Planning Policy Officers have held a workshop to discuss the scope of the West Northamptonshire Local Plan with Officers from services across the council. These included representatives from regeneration, economic development, housing, health and sustainability. This collaboration and co-creation of draft policy will continue over the course of plan preparation.

In addition, it should be noted that Officers held a workshop with Cabinet Members and held a briefing for all Members on the new Local Plan on 1st March. There are further workshops with members planned in the coming weeks covering, for example, lessons to be learned from previous Local Plans, draft policies, proposed allocations and infrastructure requirements.

Planning Policy Committee

At the Planning Policy Committee meeting on 28th February Members adopted new Conservation Area Appraisals and designations for Newnham and Brockhall. In addition, they agreed that the Harlestone Neighbourhood Development Plan could proceed to referendum.

Members debated the government's recent consultation on the proposed changes to the NPPF and agreed a corporate response on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council.

Transformation Work

The Planning Advisory Service Review (PAS Peer Review) is nearly complete and it is anticipated the plan and an associated Action Plan will be tabled at April's Cabinet meeting. PAS has been invited by the Assistant Director to support the service further with a detailed review of S106/CIL over a six-week period. This work is expected to complete in April 2023 and the constructive input of PAS is welcomed.

Work continues on the restructure of the Planning Service and this exercise, alongside a dedicated recruitment and retention campaign, is expected to complete by the end of June 2023. Engagement with staff is underway in order to shape and create one vision, one culture and one Planning Service for West Northamptonshire.

A productive meeting was held between Senior Officers and officials at DLUHC in February 2023 to discuss the service's development management performance, to provide detail of the service's transformation workstreams and to share good practice.

The Transformation Team continues to support the Planning Service with the identified workstreams needed to facilitate the new structure, embed the one team vision and improve processes. The delivery of a single planning software system across West Northamptonshire Council's administrative area will greatly support the team and the speed, consistency and efficiency of its operation.

Progress with the key milestones, alongside overall performance, will be reported monthly to Transformation Board going forward.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be high, and several contractors are supporting the service to manage this workload whilst the restructure and recruitment campaign takes place. A dedicated 'focus week' was held between 20th – 24th February to address the application backlog. During this period the Development Management Team spent five days working closely together to process new planning applications and to determine decisions on existing cases. 125 applications were determined which equates to around twice the average number of decisions usually made in a week. A very high proportion of the applications were delegated cases with complex issues. The extra time and focus spent on them meant that they could be approved, so not only were there twice as many decisions, but considerable positive and proactive decision making was achieved.

There were a number of Planning Appeals relating to major developments that were received during January and February 2023. These are to be dealt with by way of a public inquiry and are listed below. It should be noted there are an additional three informal hearing requests concerning housing developments of between 30 and 70 units which are all one-day hearings (not listed below).

Forthcoming Public Inquiries

1) Land off Holly Lodge Drive, Boughton, Northamptonshire, Outline application for construction of up to 65 dwellings, Public Inquiry – Tuesday 18 April to Thursday 20 April.

2) Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northampton, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry - Tuesday 23 May to Friday 26 May.

3) Land South of Halse Road, Greatworth, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry - Tuesday 6 June to Thursday 8 June.

For the above 3 planning Inquiries the Council has already appointed planning consultants and Kings Counsel, we are also hoping to appoint a landscape consultant for the solar farm appeals.

4) Newnham Turn Farm, Main Road, Dodford, Daventry (Enforcement Inquiry), Mobile home/s – Date tbc.

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs