

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 6 September 2022

Report of: The Director of City Development

Title: Exeter Plan: Outline draft consultation

Is this a Key Decision?

Yes

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Executive

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The report explains the progress made on the new Exeter Plan (Local Plan) and seeks approval for public consultation on an 'Outline Draft' plan which sets out the city vision, spatial strategy, draft strategic policies and potential development sites for comment.

2. Recommendations:

2.1 That the Executive approves the Outline Draft Exeter Plan (content included in Appendix A) as the basis for public consultation for eight weeks commencing on 26 September 2022; and

2.2 That the Executive gives delegated authority to the Director of City Development, in consultation with the Council Leader and Portfolio Holder for City Development, to agree minor changes to the Outline Draft Plan content before it is published for consultation.

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

3.1 As the Local Planning Authority for Exeter, the City Council has a statutory duty to prepare planning policy for the city. The Exeter Plan (the new Local Plan) will replace the two principal development plan documents for the city - the Core Strategy and the Local Plan First Review.

3.2 In autumn 2021, the Council held a public consultation on an initial Issues document which launched the work on the plan, explored a set of key issues and identified some of the initial considerations for the development strategy for the city. Since this consultation, further work has been undertaken on evidence to support the plan, the evolving development strategy, policy drafting and site assessment. This work has culminated in the preparation of an Outline Draft Plan for consultation.

3.3 Consultation is an important part of the process for preparing the Exeter Plan. The consultation will enable the wider community to inform the plan as it evolves towards further drafts, will fulfil statutory requirements and will be in accordance with the recently adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources

4.1 Staff and budgets required to prepare the Exeter Plan were agreed at Council on 21 July 2020. The recommendations made in this report result in no direct additional resource implications.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

5.1 There are no additional financial implications for Council to consider in this report.

6. What are the legal aspects?

6.1 The preparation of planning policy, usually through a Local Plan, is a legal requirement under section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This report seeks approval to hold a consultation on an 'Outline Draft' of the Exeter Plan to comply with the provisions of Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Regulation 18 requires the Local Planning Authority to undertake an early statutory consultation process.

6.2 The previous 'Issues' consultation was held to meet the requirements of Regulation 18, however it is considered important to give the community a further opportunity to influence the early stage of the plan, again in accordance with Regulation 18.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

This report raises no issues for the Monitoring Officer, as it follows the legal requirements of the authority, as detailed above.

John Street (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

8. Report details:

Background

8.1 Since the 'Issues' consultation was held between September and November 2021, further work has been undertaken to progress work on the Exeter Plan (the new name for the Local Plan). This work has focused on reviewing the responses to the previous consultation, various studies as part of the evidence base and the drafting of the plan content itself.

Summary of the consultation content

8.2 The consultation material will be in the format of an Outline Draft Plan. This will include a number of the key components of a full plan including:

- Exeter's Vision 2040;
- The spatial strategy setting out the pattern and high level characteristics of development;
- An initial set of draft strategic policies; and
- Potential development sites.

The outline draft format means that the full suite of potential, detailed policies and fully prepared development proposals will come forward for further consultation in 2023.

8.3 The vision that has been included is Exeter's Vision 2040, which was put together in 2019 in support of the Liveable Exeter initiative. It was agreed by key organisations from the city.

8.4 The proposed spatial strategy included for consultation has evolved significantly from the key components of the existing approach in our current plans, which provide for large urban extensions on the edge of the city. A key strand of the new spatial strategy is to steer the majority of development towards strategic brownfield sites in order to protect the city's landscape setting and therefore to retain Exeter's environmental quality. The strategy will also help to achieve the Council's net zero 2030 target, enable nature recovery, continue Exeter's economic success, including in the city centre, and support a healthy and inclusive city.

8.5 The Outline Draft Plan includes a series of approximately 30 thematic policies in various plan sections, which reflect the issues, which formed the basis of the previous consultation in 2021 (including the climate emergency, homes, employment and jobs amongst others). These policies do not give the full coverage required in the final plan however the majority are strategic in nature and so provide the overall direction for the plan. More detailed policies will be drafted for an additional consultation in 2023.

8.6 Finally, the consultation will include a series of development sites to meet the overall development requirements for the city in the period up to 2040. The consultation focuses on housing and mixed-use developments.

8.7 Government has calculated that Exeter needs to provide 650 homes per year. In order to meet this requirement a series of sites are identified. These include the eight large-scale strategic sites identified as part of Liveable Exeter, a series of smaller sites owned by the Council, sites promoted by third parties and a small number of sites, which are already allocated in the Core Strategy but have not yet been built out.

8.8 The material for consultation is included in Appendix A. It should be noted that the presentation style has evolved when compared with traditional planning documents because significant efforts are being made to improve the format of the consultation material to make it more engaging and intuitive. On this basis, there is more emphasis on presenting the content digitally, with a traditional, but simpler, 'document version' also being made available.

Outline draft plan consultation: Online format

8.9 In order to widen the interest in the Exeter Plan and seek involvement from a broader section of the community, the engagement on the Outline Draft Exeter Plan will evolve beyond the formal consultations which are traditionally undertaken.

8.10 As part of this wider approach, it will be important to make the Outline Draft Plan more engaging. This will be presented in a more exciting way using a new online engagement platform called 'Commonplace'.

8.11 Commonplace will be more flexible and more interactive, will support clearer and easier navigation and will enable the plan to be presented in a more attractive way with a greater focus on imagery. This greater emphasis on improving the digital presentation of the plan also aims to meet the evolving needs of the community by making plan content

more accessible on mobile devices. Finally, government is putting greater emphasis on the digitisation of the planning system and this format of presentation takes some steps in line with that wider agenda.

8.12 It should be noted that although the structure of the Exeter Plan consultation presentation will evolve, it will be in accordance with accessibility requirements. As already stated, a more traditional consultation document will be made available. The content of the material for consultation is presented in Appendix A.

8.13 To provide an indication of how the plan will look when presented in the digital format, Appendix B provides a diagrammatic structure.

Evidence

8.14 As already explained, a number of evidence base documents have been prepared in support of the Exeter Plan. This includes a Sustainability Appraisal, a Habitats Regulation Assessment, Local Housing Needs Assessment, Employment Study, landscape sensitivity assessment and a density study amongst others.

8.15 This evidence will be made available for comment during the consultation.

Consultation activities

8.16 Detailed consultation arrangements will be made in due course. However the consultation will:

- Start on 26 September 2022 and run for a period of eight weeks until 21 November 2022;
- Use the new Commonplace engagement platform as the basis for the consultation;
- Include questions on each section of the document;
- Include accessible consultation material;
- Include digital communication via the planning website and social media;
- Include hard copies of consultation materials in specified public places;
- Include a series of public exhibitions to enable face-to-face discussion;
- Be advertised in the local media, online and via social media; and
- Be advertised to the Council's existing planning policy consultation contact list.

8.17 The consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the newly adopted Statement of Community Involvement and the Consultation Charter.

After the Draft Plan consultation

8.18 A report will be brought back to Executive exploring the comments made to the consultation and explaining how they will be taken into account in shaping the next stage of the Exeter Plan. Further consultation will be held in 2023.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

9.1 The Outline Draft Plan consultation will be important in ensuring the delivery of three corporate objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan:

- Delivering Net Zero Exeter 2030;

- Promoting active and healthy lifestyles; and
- Building great neighbourhoods.

The Exeter Plan will also play a central role in tackling congestion and accessibility, the focus of one of the three strategic programmes that addresses the current major challenges facing the city.

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 There is a statutory requirement for Local Planning Authorities to prepare a Local Plan (the Exeter Plan) and the Outline Draft Plan consultation would meet the requirements of current planning legislation for the early involvement of the community in the plan-making process.

10.2 Government is, however, proposing significant changes to the planning system through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. This could affect the scope of the Exeter Plan. As the detail of the Bill emerges these will be taken into consideration in the emerging plan to ensure it accords with the prevailing legislation of the time. Government is clear about the importance of maintaining progress with preparing plans.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

11.1 Under the Act's Public Sector Equalities Duty, decision makers are required to consider the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

11.2 In order to comply with the general duty authorities must assess the impact on equality of decisions, policies and practices. These duties do not prevent the authority from reducing services where necessary, but they offer a way of developing proposals that consider the impacts on all members of the community.

11.3 In making decisions the authority must take into account the potential impact of that decision in relation to age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), sex and gender, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage and civil partnership status in coming to a decision.

11.4 In recommending the Outline Draft Plan material for consultation, a variety of impacts have been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act. This is because of the breadth of topics covered by the Exeter Plan. The majority of the impacts are considered to be positive or neutral although because the full set of policies is still emerging it is not yet possible to assess the full impact of the plan. The associated public consultation will include a variety of engagement methods making consultation material widely available. The consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the emerging Consultation Charter and the draft Statement of Community Involvement which is itself subject to a separate Equality Impact Assessment.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

12.1 There are no direct carbon/environmental impacts arising from the recommendations to hold a public consultation on the Outline Draft Exeter Plan. However, the digital consultation methods will minimise the carbon footprint associated with holding the consultation. In addition, the consultation has a key focus on the climate emergency.

13. Are there any other options?

13.1 Consultation is a key part of the process for preparing a plan as required by legislation. This consultation is required to maintain timely progress. The only other option would see a later consultation which would delay formal engagement. This is not considered to be an appropriate option.

Director of City Development, Ian Collinson

Author: George Marshall – Assistant Service Lead: Local Plan

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Adopted Exeter Core Strategy.
Adopted Exeter Local Plan Review.
Exeter Local Plan 'Issues Consultation Document'.

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