

LOCAL PLAN ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY AND ESTIMATED LOCAL PLAN BUDGET

Item HP 24/42 referred from Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee of 3 December 2024

The report of the Director of Planning, Housing and Environmental Health provided an update on the progress of a number of workstreams following the Government consultation on a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

As a revised NPPF had not yet been published the report focused on an Engagement and Consultation Strategy (attached as Annex 1) and provided an interim position in respect of the Local Plan.

The Engagement and Consultation Strategy set out the consultation details against key local plan stages, who would be engaged at the various stages and the engagement and consultation methods that would be used. Further detail in respect of engagement with Councillors, Officers and Parish/Town Councils were set out in Annex 2.

It was recognised that engagement was an essential and critical element of the plan-making process and provided an opportunity for Members, communities, partners and stakeholders to be involved. It was also important for consultation and engagement to be effective and Members welcomed the commitment to regular dialogue with parish/town councils and communities via the Parish Partnership Panel and the Tonbridge Community Forum. Other methods of engagement proposed and welcomed included consultation/drop-in sessions; virtual exhibition; digital consultation platform and digital maps.

In addition, it was hoped that the introduction of a new software platform to host the Regulation 18b and Regulation 19 Consultations would be easier for residents to navigate and interact with. The benefits of collecting information via on-line methods was outlined as it would be more efficient for the Borough Council to assess and analysis the data received. Alternative methods would be available for those who had difficulty in accessing services online and there would be opportunity for residents' views to be collected at drop-in sessions and virtual exhibitions. Residents would also be invited to sign up to receive emails or printed materials.

Members attention was drawn to the significant financial and value for money implications associated with the Local Plan preparation beyond that which was originally identified before the Government consultation and 'pausing' of the process. Detailed budgetary considerations were set out at 7.1 – 7.6 of the report. The budget provision within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had recently been increased (on an interim basis) to £160,000 to take into account that the previously identified £80,000 would likely be insufficient to meet the requirements of a new NPPF and submission timescales. Given the work that would be required to produce a national policy compliant Local Plan it was likely that additional funds beyond the £160,000 currently identified would be required. Further updates to the figures presented in the MTFS would be considered as soon as possible in line with the publication of a revised NPPF.

***RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the Local Plan Engagement and Consultation Strategy (attached at Annex 1) be approved;
- (2) the Engagement Programme (attached at Annex 2) be endorsed; and
- (3) the updates provided in relation to the Local Plan, including the likely increase in the annual budget allocation to the Local Plan reserve that would be required to progress a Local Plan under a revised National Planning Policy Framework be noted.

***Recommended to Cabinet**