

Leeds Local Plan Update – Consultation Progress (‘Your Neighbourhood, Your City, Your Planet’)

Date: 9th September 2021

Report of: Chief Planning Officer

Report to: Development Plan Panel

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city’s and council’s ambitions

- At the 21st March Development Plan Panel, Members commented on the scope of the Local Plan Update for consultation purposes, prior to approval of the material by Executive Board. The consultation, ‘Your Neighbourhood, Your City, Your Planet’ commenced on 19th July for 8 weeks and will end on 13th September. The purpose of this report is to provide an initial update to Development Plan Panel on the consultation, prior to receiving a full report after the consultation closes on 13th September.
- There is a clear role for planning in delivering against all of the Council’s priorities as established through the Best Council Plan. The consultation will help to improve and refine the ideas that we already have and contribute positively to the Council’s key strategies, as follows:

Health and Well-being Strategy – through policies including the design of places, quality of housing and accessibility to green infrastructure and services;

Climate Emergency – by managing the transition to zero carbon via policies including: increasing the energy efficiency of buildings, the design of places, the location of development, accessibility to public transport, renewable energy supply and storage

Inclusive Growth Strategy – through policies including the links between homes and jobs, the location of development, green infrastructure and connectivity.

Recommendations

Development Plan Panel is requested to:

- (i) Note and provide comment on the progress of the consultation to date;
- (ii) Note that a full report will be presented to Development Plan Panel in November, following the close of the consultation.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

1. The purpose of this report is to update Development Plan Panel on the Local Plan Update Regulation 18 consultation, prior to receiving a full report after the consultation closes on 13th September.
2. The consultation is a scoping consultation and the first key stage in the process ('Regulation 18 consultation') of preparing a Development Plan Document. As a scoping consultation, there is a balance to be struck between seeking views on the general issues of interest and concern to local people (and other stakeholders) and the leadership and ambition needed from the Council given the critical and urgent nature of the climate emergency. Early indications from participants seems to indicate that we have got that balance right. However, it is important to stress that we are not pre-judging any of the results or outputs of the consultation before it closes.
3. The consultation is guided by the principles set out in the Interim Statement of Community Involvement (ISCI), which allows us to undertake consultations online whilst the Covid-19 rates remain high. The Interim SCI also highlights the importance of plain English, accessibility and inclusion - all of which are embedded in the consultation. It is important to stress that whilst the interim SCI has curtailed face to face meetings that would normally be held, these have been replaced by a number of communication methods and there is nothing to suggest that the interim SCI has resulted in less awareness raising of the Local Plan Update. The digital consultation has considerable benefits and enhanced our ability to connect with consultees that may not have attended face to face meetings. That said, it is expected that we will be able to engage both physically and digitally on the draft plan consultation next year as restrictions and Covid-19 rates ease.
4. There are two overarching aims of the consultation: to make the material accessible to those who may not be familiar with planning or climate change issues and meaningful for those who are. Providing material in formats that meet individual's circumstances (i.e. viewable on mobile phones, use of videos, pdfs, webinars, short or detailed reading material) means a more inclusive and accessible process and a high degree of integrity.
5. To maximise accessibility, the consultation is mobile-friendly and presented in such a way that provides a sense of positive action on a range of critically important climate change issues affecting all communities in Leeds. It is a collaboration between different teams and skills from across the Council that has sought to maximise the potential for online engagement, whilst doing what we can to help those that are not comfortable or able to participate online to be able to take part.
6. There is still some time before the consultation closes and it is expected that many will submit representations during the closing week. A concerted effort will be made in the closing week to connect with and hear from all communities across the city, particularly where there have been identified gaps in responses – whether from particular neighbourhoods or groups in the city.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

7. At the heart of the Local Plan Update is the ambition for Leeds to work towards carbon neutrality by 2030. This consultation is an important step for the Council to work with people across Leeds to explore what role planning could have in achieving this.
8. The consultation poses general and specific questions on a series of 5 themes (or topics): carbon reduction, flood risk, green infrastructure, place-making and sustainable infrastructure. There is also a summary paper which serves as useful introduction and background to those who may not be familiar with the issues. The ideas presented under each of the 5 themes offer possible solutions to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change and ensure the delivery of sustainable development within Leeds.
9. The 'catch all' approach of seeking comments on both general and specific matters is intended to encourage full and open discussions on the challenges and opportunities that we face in Leeds and, ultimately, to provide endorsement, challenge and new ideas to help improve and refine the emerging ideas into a draft plan for consultation.
10. To aid the consultation, there have been 10 public webinars (2 for each of the 5 topic areas, with sessions held in daytime and evening slots), a series of pre-recorded presentations on the aims, objectives and detail of the consultation, as well as numerous targeted online presentations and workshops, including events tailored towards young people, older people and others within 'harder to reach' groups. All of the webinars and pre-recorded presentations have been recorded and made available online. Copies of presentations have also been provided on request.
11. The consultation has been promoted using a variety of social media but also by more traditional means (posters, emails and notices at meetings). Adverts for the consultation (via social media) have been seen by over 100,000 Leeds residents, giving far greater coverage than could be achieved by traditional means. Between 19 July and 24 August the material has been viewed as follows:
 - 5,903 unique page views to www.leeds.gov.uk/lpu
 - Introduction and summary - 905
 - Carbon reduction - 532
 - Green infrastructure - 416
 - Placemaking - 345
 - Sustainable infrastructure - 303
 - Flood risk – 225

12. There has also been 332 downloads of the Local Plan update as a PDF, 146 clicks to Eventbrite and YouTube for the webinars. Importantly, people have spent 3 minutes, or more on average browsing each of the topic pages (above the average for the Council's other webpages).
13. In addition to these digital methods, copies of the consultation material have been deposited at all libraries and One-Stop Centres across the city.
14. At this stage in the consultation, the response rate has been modest, with 246 responses to the consultation summary sheets and 31 detailed responses on the topic papers (as at 26th August 2021). However, it is common for the majority of comments on planning consultations to come during the final weeks.
15. This is the second major planning consultation undertaken by the Council since the Interim SCI was adopted and is an opportunity to apply, test and review how the Council can effectively engage and consult online, target groups that are often disconnected from the planning process, and to ensure that those who can't or don't want to engage online are offered alternatives.
16. This consultation will enable the Council to gather crucial data on stakeholder's views on the proposed scope of the Plan, as well as information that will enable us to develop detailed policies for the Publication version of the Plan, anticipated next year. This consultation also presents an opportunity to reflect on the new techniques employed, to consider what went well and what went less well and to apply any lessons learned to the full SCI.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

17. The initial proposed scope of the LPU has been shaped with reference to the Council's Climate Conversation and engagement with cross Council services. Initial discussion has also taken place with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA).
18. Due to the risks arising from COVID-19, face-to-face consultation has not been a significant part of the consultation, although where particular opportunities arise these will be considered where it is safe to do so
19. The consultation has been different to any other undertaken by the planning service. Being predominantly online, it has presented new challenges but also new opportunities. Online, mobile-friendly and webinar engagement has provided opportunities to engage with new people but there has been a challenge engaging with those who can't or don't want to engage online. Thankfully, it is considered that this is only a temporary issue whilst the Covid-19 rate remains high. It is expected that we will be able to resume face-to-face consultation when we consult on the draft plan and the adoption of the full SCI is an opportunity to reflect and apply lessons.

What are the resource implications?

20. The preparation of the Local Plan Update and accompanying evidence base is a resource intensive endeavour which incurs additional cost, in terms of evidence base preparation and consultation, at a time of increased budget pressure. In general, costs will be met from within existing budgets. All of the work undertaken has been with collaboration with teams from across the Council.

What are the legal implications?

21. Consultation must be in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This requires that the Local Planning Authority must notify residents, businesses and consultation bodies on the “*subject of the local plan which the local planning authority propose to prepare and invite each of them to make representations to the local planning authority about what a local plan with that subject ought to contain*”. The consultation has been undertaken in this way and using the methods noted above. Representations received shall be considered prior to the preparation of the publication draft LPU (“Regulation 19”).

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

22. The proposed direction of travel and initial options that are subject to consultation have not been assessed for their viability. Following public consultation, officers will collate the evidence and views presented by consultees, in order to create detailed policy approaches. Those approaches and alternative options will be subject to detailed viability assessments, in order to inform future versions of the Plan. As such, the service will need to commission the production of a technical evidence base with regards feasibility, deliverability and viability, which is expected to be funded through existing budgets.

23. It is also recognised that there are risks to pursuing a Local Plan Update focussed on the climate agenda. Changes to the planning system as proposed within the Government’s White Paper ‘Planning for the Future’ may result in national Development Management policies (as expressed through a revised NPPF) not giving local authorities flexibility to set their own policies on the matters proposed to be in scope for the Local Plan Update. In addition, proposed changes to the building regulations may result in local authorities having no scope to prescribe carbon emission rates from new development. It is also possible that the Government will change how Local Plans are consulted on and the stages of consultation and preparation required. Should this happen, this may require the Council to revise documentation and return to earlier stages of consultation, depending on when the changes are introduced. At present however, LPAs are being encouraged to continue progressing with their Local Plans.

Does this proposal support the council’s three Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

24. Not applicable.

How will success be measured?

25. Not applicable.

What is the timetable for implementation?

26. Not applicable.

Appendices

27. Not applicable.

Background papers

28. None.