

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-058-2015/16
Date of meeting: 3 December 2015



Portfolio: Planning Policy

Subject: Local Plan Budget and Resources update

Responsible Officer: Kassandra Polyzoides (01992 564119)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To agree a growth bid in the sum of £976,390 to the District Development Fund Local Plan budget to cover the period up to and including 2018/19;**
- (2) To recommend a Continuing Services Budget supplementary estimate in the sum of £25,000 for 2015/16 to the Council for approval; and**
- (3) To agree a growth bid for the Continuing Services Budget in the sum of £75,000 in 2016/17 to formalise the previously agreed restructure of the Planning Policy team.**

Executive Summary:

The preparation of the Local Plan for Epping Forest District is an on-going and complex process. The level of expert evidence that is required to support the emerging Local Plan is significant. The guidance on exactly what this should cover continues to evolve in light of the National Planning Policy Framework and its associated Guidance, and emerging Inspector's Reports into other Local Plan Examinations around the country. Much of the evidence and support needed requires expert knowledge on specific topics, and therefore necessitates commissioning external consultants with the requisite expertise and experience.

An addition of £976,390 is required to prepare the Local Plan, and reach adoption in accordance with the current Local Development Scheme, in September 2018.

CSB growth of £25,000 for the remainder of 2015/16, and a further growth of £75,000 in 2016/17 will be required to formalise the recently approved and implemented restructure of the Planning Policy team.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory duty for Local Authorities, and must be formulated taking into account robust and up-to-date evidence. Any Local Plan that is not supported by such evidence is more likely to be found unsound when examined by the Planning Inspectorate.

Best endeavours have been and continue to be made, to seek savings and cost efficient working where possible, for example, by making best use of economies of scale in preparing jointly commissioned evidence where appropriate. Examples of this to date include the

preparation of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Functional Economic Area study across a four authority area.

Other Options for Action:

There are no other reasonable options for action.

Report:

1. Cabinet was updated in June 2015 on the Local Development Scheme and resources for the Local Plan (C-007-2015/16). This report identified there would be a shortfall in the overall Local Plan budget, and a commitment was made to address this in the next Council budget cycle. This current report now identifies the expected expenditure on the Local Plan to reach adoption in line with the approved Local Development Scheme, in Autumn 2018. The figures presented below will be kept under regular review, in accordance with any amendments to the Local Development Scheme.

2. The table below shows the currently available budget, current spend and commitments to date in 2015/16, and estimated further spend for this financial year. This identifies that in the period up to 2018/19 when the Local Plan is expected to be adopted, a further £976,390 is required to the District Development Fund Local Plan budget. The existing budget of £469,410 can be re-profiled to cover expected expenditure to the end of 2015/16, with the remaining £61,270 rolling forward to 2016/17. Therefore, allowing for this re-profiling, additions to the DDF Local Plan budget are not required until 2016/17.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Total
Spend	£157,320	£0	£0	£0	£157,320
Committed	£146,320	£60,000	£0	£0	£206,323
Estimated spend (evidence)	£131,500	£386,310	£126,150	£0	£643,960
Estimated spend (LP process)	£0	£105,600	£105,600	£184,000	£395,200
Contingency sum (5%)				£70,000	£70,000
Total budget required	£435,140	£551,910	£231,750	£254,000	£1,472,800
Current allocation	£216,410	£280,000			£496,410
Additional requirement	£218,730	£271,910	£231,750	£254,000	£976,390

3. The detail of the projects and expenditure anticipated to be necessary to reach adoption of the Local Plan are included in Appendix 1. A number of these growth items are as a direct consequence of changes to government policy, for example, further updates needed for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and the Strategic Housing Market Assessment. In addition, there is a need to ensure that the evidence used to support the policies and allocations in the Local Plan is kept up-to-date. It will be particularly key that the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Economic Study and the Strategic Land Availability Assessment are updated immediately prior to the Draft Plan Preferred Approach consultation, due to take place during Summer 2016.

4. In preparing the Local Plan, and identifying the most appropriate set of policy choices and land allocations to deliver the eventual growth targets, a range of options will need to be tested by specific areas of evidence. This includes transport testing, flood risk assessment, infrastructure delivery, Habitat Regulation Assessment and sustainability appraisal. A number of these items have been within the work programme for some time, and are not new elements.

5. Members have recently requested further analysis of the potential development capacity within settlements is completed, and this work is now underway. This project will cost £43,100 when complete. The Local Plan budget will also now fund the Hillhouse Masterplanning exercise (£26,000) as requested by the Finance and Performance Management Committee in November 2015. A further large area of additional expenditure is the additional requirement for public relations support for the next Local Plan consultation event. A brief for this work is currently being drafted, and it is estimated this will total £50,000. Continuing use of Fortismere Associates to provide project management support to the Planning Policy team is a significant area of expenditure, as set out in the attached Appendix.

6. A restructure of the Planning Policy team to improve resilience and provide career progression opportunities was agreed by Management Board in May 2014, and the need to increase the CSB to fully implement this was heralded in a report to Cabinet in July 2014 (C-010-2014/15). Following appointment to the newly created career grade and establishment posts, the extent of CSB growth is now clear. An addition of £25,000 is required for the remainder of 2015/16, with a further £75,000 required from 2016/17, resulting in an overall growth of £100,000 per annum to the Policy Team CSB. In addition, a further DDF growth item is included to ensure that the Projects Officer position can be replaced from April 2016, following the retirement of the current postholder. An appointment will be sought for an initial 18 month contract, with the position being kept under review.

Resource Implications:

As per the report above, the District Development Fund Local Plan budget requires an additional £976,390 for the period up to 2018/19. Growth in the Planning Policy team CSB of £25,000 is required for the remainder of 2015/16, with a further £75,000 required from 2016/17, resulting in an overall growth of £100,000 per annum.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Epping Forest District Council has a statutory duty to prepare a revised Local Plan for the District, which takes into account robust and up-to-date evidence on a number of matters. Without such evidence, any Local Plan presented to the Planning Inspectorate is more likely to be found unsound, leaving the Council in a vulnerable position in respect of resisting planning applications in inappropriate locations.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The robust evidence required to support the preparation of the emerging Local Plan, seeks to meet the Council's aspirations in respect of the Safer, Cleaner & greener agenda.

Consultation Undertaken:

Director of Resources.

Background Papers:

None.

Risk Management:

The preparation of the Local Plan is one of the Council's key corporate priorities. The budgetary provisions required to ensure robust and up-to-date evidence is available to support emerging Local Plan policies is key to limiting the risk that the event document is found sound and appropriate by the Planning Inspectorate.

Due Regard Record

This page shows **which groups of people are affected** by the subject of this report. It sets out **how they are affected** and how any **unlawful discrimination** they experience can be eliminated. It also includes information about how **access to the service(s)** subject to this report can be improved for the different groups of people; and how they can be assisted to **understand each other better** as a result of the subject of this report.

S149 Equality Act 2010 requires that due regard must be paid to this information when considering the subject of this report.

The preparation of the Local Plan can potentially affect all residents, workers and visitors of the District. No protected groups are directly discriminated against by the setting of this budget.