

LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

Head of Service/Contact:	Ruth Ormella, Head of Planning
Urgent Decision?(yes/no)	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Annexes/Appendices (attached):	None
Other available papers (not attached):	None

Report summary

It is important that the Local Plan consultation is expertly undertaken so that residents, businesses, community groups and stakeholders are better informed of the Local Plan and therefore able to engage. The Borough needs to resource the Local Plan engagement for the benefit of the residents of the Borough. Through commissioning expertise the success of our communications, engagement, facilitation and management of the process will be assured.

Recommendation (s)

- (1) The Committee agrees to the proposed commissioning of consultation and engagement experts; and specialist software to enable residents to comment; for the Local Plan consultation with a budget up to £75,000, as set out in paragraph 4.3.**

1 Implications for the Council's Key Priorities, Service Plans and Sustainable Community Strategy

- 1.1 The delivery and implementation of the Epsom & Ewell Local Plan contributes towards all of the Council's Key Priorities. The emerging Local plan will set out how sustainable growth will be delivered during the next plan period 2015-2037.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Borough Council is nearing the stage where we need to undertake public consultation and engage the community on the emerging Local Plan. The Borough Council's Local Plan Programme identified autumn 2019 as being the timeframe for this consultation, and officers are aiming for this to commence at the beginning of November 2019.

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- 2.2 The Borough undertook a similar consultation between October and December of 2017. Comments made on the previous consultation have assisted in identifying a broad approach for the Borough, with the focus being on Epsom Town Centre, the district and local centres, train stations and transport corridors. We are now seeking more detailed comments from our residents and community on our proposed policies, and the sites which landowners and interested parties have identified to assist the Borough achieve the challenging housing requirement.
- 2.3 The purpose of this stage of consultation is to seek comments from businesses, residents, community groups and stakeholders on the emerging Local Plan. It is the opportunity for the Borough to set out its Vision, to present the emerging policies, all of the information and studies that have been prepared, and to identify the sites which have come forward from the Call for Sites.

3 Proposals for public Consultation

- 3.1 It is proposed that the public consultation process incorporates a range of techniques so as to ensure wide community engagement. Other than the standard notification process to all of the Council's contacts on the Local Plan database, the following is proposed:
- The preparation of a Consultation Paper which includes proposed policy approaches and seeks comments throughout the document in a systematic way;
 - Adopting a strong website presence, that clearly directs visitors to all of the information, evidence base, documents and survey;
 - The use of mapping to identify the call for sites responses using Council's GIS;
 - Holding a number of engagement events in the community, as well as key stakeholder meetings ensuring we capture local views;
 - The experience when attending planned events to be professional and engaging; and
 - The use of social media, and traditional sign posting in key locations to help elevate interest and comments.
- 3.2 The consultation process is required to run for a minimum period of six weeks. Officers are proposing that subject to the Licencing and Planning Policy Committee agreeing to the consultation materials, the consultation would run from the beginning of November 2019. It is proposed to extend the period to cover the holiday season over Christmas 2019, providing those interested in the Local Plan with sufficient time to comment.

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- 3.3 With the Local Plan consultation being a specialist form of engagement it is proposed to commission Local Plan engagement experts to assist the authority to achieve a high standard of communication of key information and messages, and to ensure the community events are successful.
- 3.4 Soft market testing assisted with identifying the costs for securing this expertise, to assist with the communications plan and key messages, public consultation events, design, management and attendance, analysis and reporting back, development of Local Plan micro site, and additional press team support. This is estimated to be in the order of £40,000.
- 3.5 It is anticipated that there will be a high level of comments on the emerging Local Plan. The survey for the Local Plan consultation is specific and as such there are specialist software applications that have been designed to meet this specialist need. These are available in the digital marketplace. Having reviewed the experience of other authorities and considered the costs, it is proposed to commission specialist software. On the basis of securing two years licence use, this is estimated to be in the order of £35,000.

4 Financial and Manpower Implications

- 4.1 In July 2019, S&R Committee approved the remaining Planning Delivery Grant balance of £155,788 to be used to fund production of the Local Plan, however, this does not include public consultation of the plan.
- 4.2 There is a need to commission expertise, additional capacity and skills so as to ensure that the Local Plan consultation is successful with a good level of engagement from residents. There is a cost associated with securing these specialist skills. There is also a need to have specialist survey software that is designed for Local plan consultations, and that this is available for use until the completion of the Local plan examination / adoption.
- 4.3 It is proposed to partially fund the £75,000 from additional income generated by the Planning Service. At quarter 1, £11,500 additional income from pre-application advice had been generated by the team. This trend is expected to continue, providing £46,000 of funding this year. The remaining balance of funding up to £75,000 will be met from the Corporate Projects Reserve.
- 4.4 **Chief Finance Officer's comments:** It is expected that the majority of the £75,000 can be funded from additional income generated by the planning team. Any shortfall can be funded from the Corporate Projects Reserve, which at 31 August 2019 holds an unallocated balance of £2,884,370.

5 Legal Implications (including implications for matters relating to equality)

- 5.1 None arising from the report.

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- 5.2 **Monitoring Officer's comments:** none arising from the contents of the report.

6 Sustainability Policy and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 None for the purposes of this report.

7 Partnerships

- 7.1 None for the purposes of this report.

8 Risk Assessment

- 8.1 Each of the community engagement events will require a risk assessment, as required for all Council events, to ensure that all potential issues are managed. Bringing in additional capacity to assist at the engagement events will assist with managing risks.
- 8.2 There are reputational risks for the authority should the Local Plan consultation not be professionally prepared or accessible for businesses, residents, community groups and stakeholders.

9 Conclusion and Recommendations

- 9.1 The Committee agrees to the proposed commissioning of consultation and engagement experts, and specialist software, for the Local Plan consultation with a budget up to £75,000.

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);