

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet

DATE: 20th September 2021

SUBJECT: Slough Local Plan – Approval of proposed Consultation on the release of Green Belt sites for family housing.

CHIEF OFFICER: Executive Director of Place

CONTACT OFFICER: Paul Stimpson, Planning Policy Manager

WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Pavitar Mann, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation

KEY DECISION: Yes

EXEMPT: No

DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN: Yes

APPENDICES: A - Part 1 of Proposed Consultation Document.

1 Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report seeks approval for the consultation on the release of Green Belt land for family housing. The consultation will inform the decision on whether any of the identified sites should be allocated for housing in the new Local Plan.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to resolve that:

- a) The Draft Consultation Document in Appendix A be agreed as the basis for public consultation on the proposed release of Green Belt sites for family housing.
- b) Delegated powers be given to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation, to make minor changes to the document.
- c) Delegated powers be given to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regulation, to make all of the necessary arrangements for a (minimum) six week public consultation exercise on the proposed release of Green Belt sites for family housing.

Reason: To make progress with the Local Plan for Slough and increase the supply of family housing in Slough.

2 Report

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The proposal to increase the supply of family housing in Slough to meet local needs supports the delivery of the 5 Year Plan and the following outcomes in particular:
- o Outcome 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay.
 - o Outcome 4: Our residents will live in good quality homes.
- 2.1.2 It also supports the Slough Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025 and its priority of having strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods.

Options considered

- Option 1 – approve the consultation on the release of Green Belt sites for family housing.
Option 2 – consider alternative sites for family housing.

Option 1 is recommended

2.2 **Background**

- 2.2.1 One of the Objectives of the Local Plan is “to meet the Objectively Assessed Housing Need of 893 dwellings within the Borough or as close as possible to where the need arises within a balanced housing market”
- 2.2.2 All the work that we have done has shown that there is a shortage of land for residential development in Slough and a shortage of sites suitable for new family housing in particular. As a result, one of the key components of the proposed Spatial Strategy is to promote the cross-border expansion of Slough to meet unmet housing needs. It is recognised that, because of the lack of any suitable brownfield sites, this would have to take place on Green Belt land.
- 2.2.3 Before we can do this, we have to make sure that we have “left no stone unturned” in our search for housing within the Borough. This means that we have to consider releasing Green Belt sites in Slough for housing. One of the advantages of this is that greenfield sites can provide lower density family housing with a higher proportion of affordable housing than brownfield sites can deliver.
- 2.2.4 As part of the work on the Local Plan both the Issues and Options and Proposed Spatial Strategy consultation documents identified ten sites that could possibly be released from the Green Belt for family housing.
- 2.2.5 In doing so large areas of Green Belt were ruled out as being unsuitable for development. This included the whole of the Colnbrook and Poyle area which was not considered suitable for family housing for environmental reasons and has been identified as part of the “Strategic Gap” in the proposed Spatial Strategy. Nevertheless, the option of building upon “other sites” has been retained for the purposes of the public consultation exercise.
- 2.2.6 These sites have been assessed against a range of planning criteria which include elements of Green Belt policy. It should be noted that they have only been subject to very high level technical and policy assessments at this stage. One of the

purposes of the consultation is to help gather evidence about what other constraints there may be to developing the sites.

- 2.2.7 In order to help inform the consultation, each site has now been given a preliminary “traffic light” assessment to indicate whether they are considered “suitable”, “possible” or “unsuitable” for housing development. The results of this are shown below:
- 2.2.8 The main reason for coming to these preliminary conclusions about the sites, which are shown in the map below, are as follows:
- 2.2.9 The development of **St Anthony’s Field** would have a significant visual impact upon the small gap between Slough and Farnham Royal resulting in the merging of the two settlements. It would also have an impact upon the adjoining Conservation Area. It is for these reasons that the site is considered to be “**unsuitable**” for housing development.
- 2.2.10 Building upon part of **Bloom Park** would result in the loss of public open space. This is considered to be sufficient reason to make this an “**unsuitable**” site for housing development.
- 2.2.11 The site **North of Muddy Lane** is part of the Singh Sabba sports centre playing field . The site consists of a strip of land along the Stoke Road frontage which is not delineated on the ground in any way. This, and the loss of private open space, is considered to make this an “**unsuitable**” site for housing development.
- 2.2.12 The **land east of Market Lane** is part of the Colne Valley Park and forms part of the Strategic Gap between Slough and greater London. It is very visible with no clearly defined boundary. As a result any development could be described as “sprawl”.
- 2.2.13 The site was identified for possible housing development in the Slough Northern Extension study produced by Atkins in 2017. It also forms part of the area of search for major housing development in the Wider Area Growth Study which is being produced by Stantec. As a result it remains as a “**possible**” housing site but it is considered that it should only come forward as part of a wider comprehensive development where a full mitigation package can be provided. This will include the necessary infrastructure to make the development sustainable and include compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the remaining Green Belt land.
- 2.2.14 The **land south of Blenheim Road** is adjacent to the recent Kings Reach housing development which was released from the Green Belt for housing development in the 2004 Local Plan for Slough. One of the reasons why the proposed site was not allocated for housing at that time was that it formed part of the designated Ditton Park Historic Park and Garden. Any harm or loss of a designated heritage asset such as a registered park and garden should require exceptional, clear and convincing justification.
- 2.2.15 The site is not in the same ownership as the rest of the park and has no discernible historic features. As a result it remains as a “**possible**” housing site provided heritage objections can be overcome with suitable mitigation. There are no fundamental policy objections to the development of the cluster of sites around Wexham Park Hospital. Land to the south was released from the

Green Belt in the 2004 Local Plan and the three proposed sites would result in the rounding off of development in the area.

- 2.2.16 As a result **Wexham Park Hospital School of Nursing site, Wexham Street; Land to the rear of Opal Court Wexham Street; and Land east of Wexham Park Hospital** are considered to be “**suitable**” for housing development. **Land east of Rochfords Gardens** is a natural infilling site because it is surrounded by development on three sides. It is field with no intrinsic qualities. As a result it is considered to be a “**suitable**” site for housing development.
- 2.2.17 The **land at Upton Court Farm** is a partly underutilised site close to the centre of Slough. It has a number of buildings on the northern side fronting Upton Court Road and is well contained. As a result, on balance, this is considered to be a “**suitable**” site for residential development.
- 2.2.18 It is recognised that the fact that all of these sites are within the Green Belt remains the biggest policy constraint to development. Government policy attaches great importance to Green Belts which are intended to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. This means that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered through the preparation of plans where there are “exceptional circumstances” which are “fully evidenced and justified”. The NPPF states that, before green belt boundaries are redrawn, an authority must demonstrate that it has “examined all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development”, including making use of brownfield land, increasing the density of existing settlements and exploring whether neighbouring authorities can help meet its needs. How this has been done is explained in Section 7 of Appendix A.
- 2.2.19 The final decision as to whether the necessary “exceptional circumstances” exist to justify allocating any of these sites for family housing will have to be made when the final version of the Local Plan is produced. This will be able to take account the results of public consultation and all other factors in determining whether there are the necessary exceptional circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt land for housing. This “publication” version of the plan will be the subject of a further round of public consultation before it is submitted for an examination by the Planning Inspector.
- 2.2.20 Details of the proposed consultation exercise have not yet been finalised but it will take place over a six week period before Christmas. It is envisaged that a full range of consultation methods will be used including holding public meetings if this is permitted. Delegated powers are therefore being sought to finalise the arrangements for the public consultation and make minor changes to the consultation document.
- 2.2.21 A draft of part 1 of the proposed consultation document is included in Appendix A. Part 2 will contain a more detailed assessment of each site.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

The proposed consultation will cost around £15k which can be met from the existing Local Plan consultation budget. This will cover the extension of the contract for the Citizen Space consultation hub which will then continue to be available for any

consultations that the Council carries out. It will also cover the cost of all publicity material and consultation events.

3.2 Legal implications

Under Section 13 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the Council must keep under review the matters which may be expected to affect the development of their area or the planning of its development. As part of this there is a statutory requirement to produce a Local Plan which has to be the subject of public consultation. Local Plans are required to make sufficient provision for housing. Failure to meet the legal requirements or the tests of soundness would mean that the plan could not be adopted.

3.3 Risk management implications

The Local Plan is a Council Gold Project which means that the progress and risks associated with its preparation are regularly reported and assessed.

3.4 Environmental implications

The environmental impact of developing the proposed sites for housing has been included within the individual site assessments. A Sustainability Appraisal has also been produced which will also be the subject of public consultation.

3.5 Equality implications

There is a duty to carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment of proposals and policies. An initial assessment of the proposed release of Green Belt sites for family housing has shown that in general this would have a positive impact upon people in housing need, particularly those needing affordable family housing. Following consultation, a more detailed EIA will be undertaken and the results will be taken into account in decisions about the Local Plan.

4. **Background Papers**

Review of the Local Plan for Slough Issues and Options Consultation Document (2017)

Local Plan for Slough – Proposed Spatial Strategy Consultation Document (2020)