

TITLE OF REPORT: Update on Preparation of a New Local Plan

REPORT OF: Anneliese Hutchinson, Interim Strategic Director,
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Purpose of the Report

1. To notify Members of progress on the Gateshead Plan, and to summarise the outcomes from the 'Start of the Conversation' consultation.
2. To recommend to Council to agree that Gateshead Council and Newcastle City Council work jointly on a new Local Plan for both authorities.

Background

3. Every local authority is required to prepare a Local Plan. Gateshead's current Local Plan is in three parts. The first and second parts are the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan, which were adopted in March 2015 and prepared jointly with Newcastle. The third part is Making Space for Growing Places, which was adopted in February 2021. Although the current Local Plan does not expire until 2030, we need to review our Local Plan every 5 years and the Council needs to ensure that it has a planning framework which is up to date, reflects the ambitions of the borough and is based on a robust evidence base.
4. Cabinet agreed on 24th October 2023, that a new Local Plan should be prepared which aligns with the Council's ambitions and adheres to new legislation and planning guidance. Cabinet also approved [the Start of the Consultation: the Gateshead Plan](#) for consultation. The purpose of this consultation was to gain an understanding from our residents as to what they consider to be the challenges and issues facing Gateshead and to seek the public's views on our spatial ambitions for the future. A Feedback Report (see Appendix 2) details the key messages that have emerged from the consultation.
5. Since then, there have been significant changes to planning legislation including the proposed enactment of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and the publication of proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. Legislation is also expected to come forward quickly to enable Mayoral Authorities to prepare Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs).
6. Gateshead and Newcastle are proposing to work together to prepare a joint Local Plan. A joint approach would have a number of benefits:
 - it would put us in a stronger position to address cross-boundary issues;

- there would be economies of scale in preparing evidence and undertaking an examination jointly;
- it would support the government's ambition to bring forward partnership working between Local Planning Authorities and Combined Authorities; and
- there is also potential for joint working to support our housing delivery in light of higher mandatory housing requirements being set by government, and challenging site viability.

7. The NewcastleGateshead Plan will provide a strategic planning framework to meet our joint ambitions for sustainable economic growth and will help the Council address our priorities to tackle poverty and improve health outcomes, address the cost-of-living crisis and work towards achieving the target of Net Zero carbon emissions and becoming an economically inclusive borough.

Proposal

8. Cabinet is requested to:

- Approve the publication of the Consultation Feedback Report on the 'Start of the Conversation' consultation at Appendix 2.
- Recommend to Full Council that approval be granted for the preparation of a joint Local Plan working with Newcastle City Council supported by joint governance set out in Appendix 3.
- Recommend to Full Council that approval be granted for the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding, providing details of responsibilities of the partners both individually and collectively, establishing guidelines for joint working and that delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director of Economy, Innovation and Growth, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport to agree the Memorandum of Understanding.

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that:

- (i) Cabinet notes the progress on the Gateshead Plan.
- (ii) Cabinet approves publication of the Start of the Conversation Consultation Feedback Report.
- (iii) Cabinet recommends to Full Council to agree to the preparation of a joint Local Plan working with Newcastle City Council supported by joint governance and the development of a Memorandum of Understanding for joint working arrangements.

For the following reasons:

1. To progress the development of the Gateshead Local Plan as required by government policy and our statutory obligations under the Town and Country Planning Act 2004, Localism Act 2011 and Town and Country Planning (Local Plans) Regulations 2012.

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Policy Context

1. The proposal to progress a new Local Plan jointly with Newcastle City Council will closely align with the Council's pledge to make Gateshead a place where everyone thrives. A new Plan will allow us to meet the needs of the population and the economy, and to support health and wellbeing, through provision for employment, housing (particularly family homes), and all related facilities in ways that will ensure a sustainable and positive future for Gateshead.

Background

2. Every local authority is required to prepare a Local Plan. Gateshead's current Local Plan is in three parts. The first and second parts are the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan, which were adopted in March 2015 and prepared jointly with Newcastle. The third part is Making Space for Growing Places, which was adopted in February 2021. Although the current Local Plan does not expire until 2030, we need to review our Local Plan every 5 years and the Council needs to ensure that it has a planning framework which is up to date, reflects the ambitions of the borough and is based on a robust evidence base.
3. Cabinet agreed on 24th October 2023, that a new Local Plan should be prepared which aligns with the Council's ambitions and adheres to new legislation and planning guidance. Consultation was therefore carried out earlier this year on the 'Start of the Conversation – the Gateshead Plan' to help to understand issues which are important to our communities and what our priorities should be for developing the next Local Plan. These were set out across several themes responding to the social, economic and environmental challenges which the borough is facing. We asked a series of questions as part of the consultation and set out the current position and matters which the Local Plan could potentially address.
4. We prepared a Communications and Engagement Strategy for the Start of the Conversation consultation which aimed to have a simple, transparent and inclusive conversation with our communities about the type of place people think Gateshead should be by 2045. We promoted consultation and engagement through social media channels and developed a digital platform which allowed people to either view and comment on all the themes or focus on a particular topic of interest.
5. We received a good level of response to the consultation with 152 comments submitted and the Consultation Feedback Report at Appendix 2 summarises the consultation comments received and the Council's response at this stage. Key messages from the consultation, and challenges for the Local Plan to address include:

- Support for development to be sustainably located to maximise opportunities for active travel and public transport, including in rural areas;
- Support for improving health and addressing health inequalities;
- Recognition of the challenges of viability and addressing climate change, with support for tree planting and nature-based solutions to address flood risk;
- Support from residents for brownfield development next to public transport links;
- A majority of respondents supporting the growth of the borough and its working age population;
- The need for a green belt review referred to given the difficulty in developing some sites; and
- The need to review the role and function of centres and employment areas recognising their multifunctional use and emerging connected community principles.

Planning Reform

6. The government has announced major reform of the planning system and has already consulted on a new draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Proposed changes to the NPPF place a focus on the delivery of housing, employment and infrastructure and reinforce the importance of having up to date Local Plans. The government has made clear that Local Plans must be prepared to deliver new housing targets set out in a new methodology. The brownfield first approach remains and cross boundary/collaborative working will be needed to meet housing or commercial needs. The proposal for preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy by NECA will be key to considering how Councils can work together to deliver development needs.
7. On 17th July 2024, various proposed Bills were set out in the King's Speech including a Planning and Infrastructure Bill and an English Devolution Bill. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill will play a key role in addressing constraints, unlocking more housing and infrastructure, and supporting sustained economic growth. The government has said the planning system must be an enabler of growth, enabling democratic engagement with how, not if, homes and infrastructure are built. The Bill will speed up and streamline the planning process to build more homes of all tenures and accelerate the delivery of major infrastructure projects in alignment with other strategies including industrial, energy, and transport strategies.
8. Proposals for an English Devolution Bill will ensure that devolved decision-making is at the heart of the economy and is a key driver of economic growth. Legislation will be introduced to give new powers to Metro Mayors and Combined Authorities. Local Leaders will be able prepare regional plans, including statutory Spatial Development Strategies that bring economic benefit to communities giving Local Leaders greater powers. The

Bill will include enhanced powers over strategic planning, local transport networks, skills, and employment support.

9. Reforms will change the preparation of Local Plans by streamlining the stages of Local Plan preparation so that they are prepared more quickly and further, are expected to align with and deliver the growth set out in Spatial Development Strategies, which for us will be prepared by NECA. Further proposals which will impact on planning include streamlining the delivery process for critical infrastructure, accelerating upgrades to the national grid, boosting renewable energy, and empowering local communities with a new 'right to buy' for valued community assets.

Joint Working

10. As the government is keen to bring forward partnership working between Local Planning Authorities and Combined Authorities, Gateshead and Newcastle are proposing to work together to prepare a joint Local Plan.
11. Joint working on our Local Plan would support the move towards devolved working, addressing cross boundary matters. Planning does not stop at boundaries and working jointly with Newcastle could help us to deliver our ambitions and have the benefit of placing us at the centre of the NECA area, thereby being well positioned for collaborating on strategies and projects. Planning jointly for needs in the Local Plan could potentially result in a joint approach to considering requirements and meeting housing requirements. This would be advantageous given the challenges of housing delivery and the recent government announcement that they will set out housing requirements. There would additionally be a benefit of budget savings resulting from preparing a single Local Plan rather than preparing separate evidence reports and having two examinations.
12. Newcastle have also recently carried out an early consultation exercise on a series of draft ambitions. We have reviewed their ambitions and consultation comments, and it is evident that there are common issues and cross boundary priorities which need to be addressed across our areas. Using feedback from our consultation exercises and reflecting our corporate priorities and strategies, we could draft joint ambitions/objectives with Newcastle to support preparation of a draft spatial strategy as part of the next stage of work on the Local Plan. The approach would be to plan jointly across the area and have joint development targets including for housing, employment and our natural environment.
13. Consultation and engagement on a draft vision and spatial strategy at the next stage of plan making will give our communities the opportunity to get involved in considering potential locations for development and helping to shape draft policies. Starting work on a draft spatial strategy will put us in a strong position to have an up-to-date positive strategy in place at the earliest opportunity. Initial work would focus on development of evidence needed to support the spatial strategy and policy direction.

14. A governance structure for joint working is set out in Appendix 3. To deliver the Local Plan it is proposed that work will be managed at an Officer level through the Joint Local Plan Board which will be an equal partnership between the constituent Councils, with equal representation and joint responsibility for preparation of the Local Plan. A dedicated team of Officers could be set up. It is proposed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is prepared to set out how the Councils will work together. The MOU is essentially an operational document entered into to clarify and record the responsibilities of the Councils, both individually and collectively and to establish guidelines for joint working.
15. The NewcastleGateshead Plan will provide a strategic planning framework to meet our joint ambitions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, will help the Council address our priorities to tackle poverty and improve health outcomes, address the cost-of-living crisis and work towards achieving the target of Net Zero carbon emissions.

Consultation

16. The proposed approach has been discussed at Environment and Transport Portfolio.

Alternative Options

1. The alternative options would be to:
 - a. Not progress a new Local Plan. This would be reputationally damaging and lead to Government intervention to produce a Local Plan for the authority.
 - b. Pursue separate Local Plans which would weaken Gateshead's position and influence within NECA as the government seeks to introduce strategic plans, and would mean potential increased costs due to preparing evidence and going through Examination separately.

Implications of Recommended Option

2. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The costs of the Local Plan will be met from allocated reserves.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – Currently anticipated to be delivered within existing resources. This will be kept under review alongside other work priorities.
- c) **Property Implications** - There are no direct property implications arising from this Report.

3. **Risk Management Implication** - There are risks that national changes to planning may impact on the timetable for preparing the Plan: the government has consulted on changes to the NPPF and will introduce Bills that affect planning. Whilst there is some uncertainty, it is important to start this early stage which will put the Council in a strong position to proceed with preparation of a draft Local Plan. For the time being, the preparation of a new Plan will follow the current legislation, National Planning Policy Framework and planning guidance.
4. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - The Local Plan will be subject to ongoing Equality Impact Assessment.
5. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct crime and disorder implications.
6. **Health Implications** - The Local Plan will recognise the Health and Wellbeing Strategy - and will be accompanied by an independent Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of the social, environmental, economic, health and equality effects. The SA is integral to the plan making process to ensure decisions are made that contribute to achieving sustainable, healthy and equitable development.
7. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - the Local Plan will recognise that the Council has declared a climate emergency and will be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal (SA). The SA is integral to the plan making process to ensure decisions are made that contribute to achieving sustainable, healthy, and equitable development.
8. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no direct human right implications.
9. **Ward Implications** - The Local Plan will cover every ward in Gateshead.

Background Information

- [Start of the Conversation: the Gateshead Plan](#)
- [Communications Plan](#)
- [Sustainability Appraisal](#)

APPENDIX 2 – Local Plan Consultation Feedback Report (see attachment)

APPENDIX 3 – Joint Local Plan Governance (see attachment)