



**CABINET – 22 OCTOBER 2019**

**RESPONSE TO BLABY DISTRICT COUNCIL'S NEW LOCAL PLAN  
ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**PART A**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek agreement for the County Council's response to the consultation issued by Blaby District Council relating to its 'New Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation'.

**Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that the comments set out in paragraphs 18 to 52 and the detailed consultation response appended to this report be approved as the County Council's response to Blaby District Council's New Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation.

**Reasons for Recommendation**

3. To confirm the County Council's response to Blaby District Council (further to the comments submitted by officers on 10 October). To seek to ensure alignment with the strategic outcomes of the County Council's Strategic Plan, with the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP), and to influence the content of the Local Plan in the interests of local communities.

**Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

4. An officer response was submitted to Blaby District Council on 10 October 2019.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

5. On 23 November 2018, the Cabinet approved the Strategic Growth Plan "Leicester and Leicestershire 2050: Our Vision for Growth". Each of the nine other partners approved the SGP through their respective governance processes between October to December 2018, including Blaby District Council on 13 November 2018.
6. Leicester and Leicestershire's Strategic Growth Plan and its delivery through Local Plans are important contributions to achieving the vision set out in

“Working Together for the Benefit of Everyone”, the County Council’s Strategic Plan for 2018-22 which was approved by the Council in December 2017.

7. On 15 May 2019 the County Council declared a Climate Emergency, and in doing so agreed to take a number of actions including reducing emissions from road transport and waste disposal, and to work with other partners and public bodies to deliver the ambitious goal of carbon neutrality by 2030 via all relevant technologies, strategies and plans.

### **Resource Implications**

8. There are no direct resource implications arising from this report.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

9. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council representing Blaby divisions.

### **Officers to Contact**

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## **PART B**

### **Background**

#### **The Strategic Growth Plan and Local Plans**

10. The Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP), and the local plans through which it will be delivered, will make important contributions to achieving the vision set out in “Working Together for the Benefit of Everyone”, the County Council’s Strategic Plan for 2018-22. The SGP supports all five strategic outcomes, but has a particularly important role in contributing to the delivery of the Strong Economy and Affordable and Quality Homes outcomes.
11. The SGP has been prepared jointly by the seven local planning authorities in the county (district councils), the County Council as the highway authority, Leicester City Council as a unitary authority with combined planning and highways responsibilities, and the LLEP. A partnership Members Advisory Group, chaired by Mr. Pendleton CC, oversees its preparation and delivery.
12. The SGP sets out a strategy for the growth and development of Leicester and Leicestershire over the period to 2050, enabling partners to consider the longer term needs of the area and opportunities which extend beyond the conventional timeframe of a Local Plan.
13. It enables partners to plan effectively for the future, providing Local Plans with a consistent strategic framework for the wider area, guiding decisions on infrastructure investment and helping make the case for Government funding.
14. For the wider southern part of Leicestershire, which includes Blaby district, the foci for growth set out in the SGP are:
  - i. The A46 Priority Growth Corridor;
  - ii. Managed growth for Lutterworth and Market Harborough; and
  - iii. The A5 Improvement Corridor.
15. The essential infrastructure to support the delivery of growth shown on the SGP strategy diagram for the wider southern part of Leicestershire are the M1 smart motorway, a new Junction 20a on the M1, A46 Expressway, A5 Expressway and rail improvements.
16. This is the second consultation on a Local Plan review in Leicester and Leicestershire to take place since the approval of the SGP in December 2018. It is therefore appropriate, at this stage, to consider compliance of the potential options for growth with the strategic steer provided by the SGP.
17. Since the SGP was approved in December 2018 the County Council has declared a Climate Change Emergency. It will work towards carbon neutrality by 2030; and aims to lead by example working through how it is going to deliver services in a carbon neutral way. It will seek to reflect the Climate Change Emergency in the Council’s Strategic Plan when it is updated and the Environment Strategy is to be revised and an action plan developed.

## Proposed Response to the Issues and Options Consultation

### Overarching and general comments

18. The County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on a full issues and options consultation, is pleased to note the marked increase in housing completions in the district of Blaby in recent years and the recent awards received in recognition of the high quality development achieved at the Lubbesthorpe Sustainable Urban Extension.
19. The Council welcomes that issues and options are identified in relation to the overall scale of growth and the locational strategy, as well as for specific themes such as housing, employment, strategic green designations, health and well-being, open space, sport and recreation, natural environment, climate change and transport etc.
20. The Council's responses to the 27 consultation questions are set out in the officer response (the Appendix to this report) and have been informed by the views of a number of Council services including transport, environment, education, strategic property services, economic growth and ecology.
21. The County Council notes the timetable for the preparation of the new Local Plan and wishes to continue to work closely with Blaby District Council in developing preferred options for future consultation. Close working will help ensure the alignment of infrastructure delivery and the identification and management of critical dependencies regarding infrastructure delivery.

### Scale of Growth and Locational Strategy

22. The SGP's locational strategy recognises that the current approach to accommodating growth (focused on urban concentration and sustainable urban extensions) cannot be sustained into the future. It is important that local plans reflect the new locational strategy, and in this context the Council prefers Locational Strategy Option D (Infrastructure led development at strategic sites / garden villages) as this provides the greatest potential to deliver key essential infrastructure to support the growth proposed in the SGP.
23. Successful delivery of this option will require effective strategic masterplanning. This will enable the scale and location of strategic sites and how they function as extended or new communities to be fully considered.
24. Within the A46 Priority Growth Corridor in the district of Blaby it is highly likely that there will be a strong functional relationship with Leicester, including the city centre, emphasising the importance of radial and orbital routes and high quality public transport provision.
25. Careful consideration will need to be given to the infrastructure that could reasonably be expected to be delivered during the local plan period and how this would align with and facilitate specific growth opportunities and locations. Identifying early infrastructure priorities for delivery during the plan period could

open up currently inaccessible locations for strategic development both during the Local Plan period and beyond.

26. Developments in the priority growth corridor would need to be strategically planned as distinct new communities supported by appropriate sustainable travel opportunities, including high-quality public transport links to the principal urban area to minimise the need to travel by car. Phasing of supporting transport (and other key) infrastructure and services will be crucial to ensure these are introduced in a timely fashion, such that new communities can develop and function effectively during the interim build-out phase.
27. It is also important to note that the cumulative impact of multiple development proposals spread across an area can be problematic for the highway network, particularly when seeking to secure appropriate mitigation through the Development Management process. The move towards more development being focused on strategic sites should help in this respect.

### *Housing*

28. In terms of the preferred approach to calculating the future housing requirement for Blaby the Council prefers Option C which is consistent with the approach set out in the SPG and involves using the Government's standard methodology and providing for a share of Leicester's unmet need towards the end of the Plan period.

### *Affordable Housing*

29. Option B, which proposes modifying the existing thresholds and percentages for affordable housing provision, is preferred. Setting a lower threshold would enable more market housing sites to contribute towards the provision of affordable homes. Option C (allocating sites specifically for affordable housing) is advised against as it could result in sites simply not coming forward for development if funding is not available.

### *Housing for an ageing population*

30. The Council would like to see stronger policy requirements and specific allocations included in the Plan, with the location of such provision needing to be carefully considered in terms of accessibility to key services bearing in mind specialist needs and mobility issues.

### *Employment*

31. With respect to Employment Land Provision the Council prefers Option B which would involve Blaby working with neighbouring authorities to meet the different types of employment requirements across a wider area (and updating the joint evidence base where required). Given the nature of the employment land market it is imperative that neighbouring local authorities co-operate to ensure effective planning in support of employment growth for the wider economy.

### *Strategic Green Infrastructure*

32. In relation to strategic green infrastructure the Council supports Option A involving a continuation of existing designations, including retaining Green Wedge, Area of Separation and Countryside designation in principle and reviewing their detailed boundaries in the context of new Local Plan site allocations. The Council values these designations. Green wedges have been an effective policy tool, helping to provide green lungs and physical identity and distinctiveness for communities.

### *Health and Well-being*

33. The Council agrees with the health and wellbeing issues identified. It is considered that Issue 5, which refers to residents of Blaby district being heavily reliant on private cars to travel to work and leisure and to walk and ride connections being improved between key work, leisure and residential sites should also consider opportunities to increase the co-location of homes and jobs to facilitate active modes of transport.

### *Healthy Communities*

34. The Council prefers option B involving consideration being given to including a specific healthy communities policy in the Local Plan. The suggested requirement that new residential proposals over a certain size should submit a Health Impact Assessment is supported as it would mean that health considerations would be explicitly considered at an early stage allowing the development proposal to be positively influenced prior to securing planning permission.

### *Design*

35. Raising the bar with regards to design is a key aspiration of the SGP; a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on design could effectively help to secure higher quality design as could other tools such as the use of design codes on strategic sites.

### *Natural Environment*

Option B, which entails mapping all components of local wildlife-rich and wider ecological networks, is supported. Key natural assets and the wildlife corridors between them need to be understood so that opportunities to enhance the natural environment and create new links can be taken in the strategic masterplanning of growth.

### *Climate Change*

36. With respect to climate change the Council would like to see each of the three options being pursued (and not just considered). New national policy and guidance should be taken fully into account in the new policy. The exploration of decentralised energy supply systems, such as combined heat and power, for

strategic sites could help to reduce their ongoing carbon footprints. These together with a Supplementary Planning Document providing more guidance on sustainable development and design, this would provide a strong policy steer on what action should be taken at the local level. The Council would welcome SPD being jointly developed by the two councils.

37. The County Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral as a council by 2030 and to working with others to keep global temperature rise to less than 1.5 degrees centigrade. This will require the county to be carbon neutral by 2050 if not before. Planning is one of the key levers for enabling these commitments to be met and to meeting the legally binding target set by the government for the UK to be carbon neutral by 2050.
38. To have any chance of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 or before all or most new buildings need to be carbon neutral or positive and there needs to be a programme of retrofitting to improve the efficiency of existing buildings. In addition, there will be a need to significantly increase efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity to support the need to provide carbon sequestration, to provide resilience from extreme weather events and to reduce the worst economic and social impacts of the significant decline in biodiversity within the UK. Leicestershire has the second lowest level of biodiversity in the UK.
39. At a minimum all three options need to be undertaken as part of an urgent step change in updating planning policies and plans so that they actively support and reinforce action to achieve carbon neutrality and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. This could be done in stages i.e. moving from option A through B to C, but this would need to be done over a short timespan due to the urgency for action.

#### *Economy, retail and leisure*

40. The identified issues are supported but it is suggested that a further issue be added. The growth in on-line sales has resulted in a decrease in the need for physical stores on the High Street and has resulted in an oversupply of retail units. There is a case to be made that there are too many retail units and conversion back to residential or other uses should be encouraged rather than leaving vacant units that affect the vitality and viability of existing retail centres.
41. Option B, allowing for a greater level of flexibility of uses within Blaby Town Centre and Neighbourhood Parades, is welcomed. More flexibility will help to bring vacant secondary frontages back into use. This would help to bring more vitality and viability into the town centre and parades by virtue of vacant units being removed, more presence of people and greater surveillance helping to increase a sense of well-being and safety.

#### *Transport*

42. The identified issues are agreed but there are several additional issues to consider:

- Access to the strategic road network (SRN; especially the M1) is limited to a couple of junctions shared with the wider Leicester urban area, exacerbating pressure on these junctions and meaning there is limited network resilience to any incidents at or near these locations.
- A large proportion of traffic using the SRN within the district (i.e. M1 J21-21a and A46 western bypass) is for shorter local journeys, which pushes these routes close to or over capacity at peak-times and conflicts with longer distance traffic.
- Orbital connectivity in and around the urban area of the district is arguably as important as radial connectivity into Leicester city centre and yet provision is limited (by all modes) and constrained by key bottlenecks within and without the district (e.g. around the M1 J21 area).
- In relation to issue 22 and the preceding points, congestion hotspots can encourage traffic to 'rat run' along less suitable rural routes through the district, particularly along (alternative) 'orbital routes' around the periphery of the Leicester urban area.
- It is important that maximise usage is made of the district's existing commercial bus network and Park and Ride services wherever possible, to support their future viability and growth.
- In relating to the preceding point, existing public transport in the district is primarily centred on radial connectivity into Leicester City Centre and does not necessarily reflect the travel-to-work and/or shift patterns of key employers within Blaby district, limiting scope for modal shift.

43. A combination of transport policy options A to E is likely to be required and should be informed to a degree by transport evidence undertaken for the New Local Plan and by Leicester City Council's Transforming Cities initiatives, and proposals to tackle air quality problems within the City particularly work place parking.

#### *Infrastructure*

44. The identified issues are agreed. It is important to note that the SGP identifies essential infrastructure that will need to be brought forward in a timely manner to support future growth. Some of the essential infrastructure will need to be identified in the new Local Plan and longer term beyond the end date of the new Local Plan. The new Local Plan will need to be mindful of the longer term requirements for infrastructure so that essential infrastructure still to be built out is able to be delivered.

45. It should also be noted that infrastructure capacity constraints are not just limited to health facilities and schools. New development will have an impact on other types of infrastructure such as green infrastructure and the wider waste transfer network, including Household Waste Recycling Sites.

#### *Strategic Property Services Asset Management response*

46. The (officer) Strategic Property Services Asset Management Group has commented in relation to the County Council's role as landowner, in summary:



47. In respect of the locational strategy and the themes identified in the consultation document the views of strategic property are aligned with the rest of the authority. In particular, there is strong support for option D in the locational strategy. However; not all development will take place on strategic sites but also within rural centres and Blaby town; and they should receive allocations in accordance with their scale and position in the settlement hierarchy in order to support the sustainability of those centres and maintain services for individual communities.
48. In addition to supporting the general comments on the provision of affordable housing it is considered that the affordable housing requirement should be based on a robust assessment of needs and applied flexibly to take account of site specific circumstances including viability.
49. The importance of maintaining the vitality and viability of Blaby Town Centre is supported and the recognition that this can be achieved through future economic growth and the delivery of appropriate additional housing and employment opportunities such as the Council's site at Hospital Lane.
50. Taking a more strategic approach as the ability exists to co-locate major employment sites with strategic housing development to maximise the potential for creating sustainable communities is supported.
51. In addition to responding to the consultation, appropriate submissions have also been made to the Call for Sites (which is part of the Local Plan-making process) in respect of:

- **Land at Sapcote and Stoney Stanton.**

The County Council owns 62 hectares of land which would form part of a much larger SDA focussed on M69 J2 and situated to the west of Stoney Stanton and Sapcote. Working in collaboration with other landowners the potential exists through the delivery of new and improved infrastructure to create a new settlement of 4500 new homes together with extensive employment opportunities and all the necessary schools, shops, services, community facilities and green spaces required to support the new community. The scheme is strongly supported by the County Council as evidenced by the resolution of Cabinet on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2019 which commits the Council to taking the necessary steps to help secure the successful delivery of the site together with the supporting infrastructure. The other landowners with interests in the wider site will, through this consultation, be confirming their commitment to progressing the scheme thereby demonstrating the site's availability and deliverability.

- **Land at Hospital Lane, Blaby**

The Council owns 23 hectares of land situated at Hospital Lane, Blaby which lies to the east of the town outside the extents of the to the flood plain and green wedges bounding the settlement. A site extending to 10.95 hectares of which 5.47 hectares, lying outside the designated area of local green space, would be brought forward for built development was

submitted to the 2019 Call for Sites consultation. Accordingly, development of this scale could be delivered in this sustainable location to meet the housing needs of the town and the wider District and make a positive contribution to the vitality of the town. Further, Blaby is seen as an appropriate location for development being situated within one of the SEP's five priority economic areas.

It is confirmed that the land is both available, with a willing landowner, and deliverable. Further the site at Hospital Lane would be capable of delivering sustainable transport links with the Town Centre and deliver significant community benefits including highways infrastructure and the potential extension to Bouskell Park through the delivery of a financially viable site. Additional information addressing perceived constraints to development will be provided to the local planning authority to provide confidence that the site provides a deliverable development option.

- **Other land**

The Council owns further land across the district which would meet the criteria of the preferred option including land at Leicester Road, Countesthorpe a 9.65 acre site that has the potential to deliver additional sports facilities to the village in addition to housing thereby supporting the sustainability of the settlement.

52. All of the above sites together with other potentially deliverable sites across the District have been submitted to previous Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments and Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments.

### **Equality and Human Rights Implications**

53. There are no equality and human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet on 23 November 2018: Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan – Consideration of Revised Plan for Approval  
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=4603&Ver=4>

Report to Council on 6 December 2017: Strategic Plan and Single Outcomes Framework  
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=5104&Ver=4>

Minutes of the County Council meeting held on 15 May 2019 (10 (a) Climate Emergency) <http://cexmodgov1/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=5112>

### **Appendix**

Leicestershire County Council officer response to Blaby District Council's New Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation.