



## Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Forward timetable of consultation and decision making

Finance and Performance Scrutiny

9 June 2025

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### Local Plan budget overview

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Report of Head of Planning

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To inform Finance & Performance Scrutiny of current Local Plan budgets and expenditure for 2024/25.
- 1.2 The report follows a request from the Finance & Performance Scrutiny meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> March 2025 for a brief report on expenditure of the Local Plan.

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 Finance & Performance Scrutiny note the expenditure of the Local Plan budget for 2024/25 and note funding contributions received in addition to existing identified budgets for 2025/26.

#### **3. Background to the report**

- 3.1 The production of a new Local Plan falls within the Planning Policy Team as part of the wider Planning service. The new Local Plan will replace the existing Core Strategy (2009) and Site Allocations and Development Management Development Plan Document (2015) together with the Area Action Plans in setting out site allocations to meet housing and employment needs together with relevant policies for determining planning applications to 2045.
- 3.2 The new Local Plan has progressed in 2024 to Regulation 18 stage, with a consultation on a draft Local Plan, including strategic site allocations, in summer 2024. This consultation received c. 800 responses. Since this Regulation 18 consultation, the Government published in December 2024 a new National Planning Policy Framework together with an updated formula for

calculating housing need. This updated formula, referred to as the standard method, increased need for the Borough from 433 dwellings per annum to 659 dwellings per annum. This change is reflected in a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) as discussed below.

- 3.3 A new Local Plan, setting out both allocation policies to meet housing and employment needs together with relevant protection and enabling policies, has to be evidenced based to ensure that its contents meet the test of being 'justified'. This evidence base has to support proposed site allocations, policies and strategies and is subject to an examination in public by a government appointed examiner. This examination will include scrutiny of the document by the examiner and also by all relevant statutory consultees, site promoters and members of the public.
- 3.4 The Local Plan includes an identified budget for the required evidence base. The evidence base is a suite of documents, with these produced both in house and through specialist external consultants. Some of these are relevant for the Borough only, with other documents cross boundary and covering either county wide or commissioned jointly with neighbouring Local Planning Authorities.
- 3.5 As identified in the Finance & Performance Scrutiny meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> March, the Local Plan budget for 2024/25 identified an overspend. This overspend, of actual spend of £374,373 was against an identified budget of £211,571 for Local Plan evidence.
- 3.6 This overspend for 2024/25 for Local Plan evidence can predominantly be allocated to one evidence project – Local Plan Habitat Survey & Burbage Common and Woodland Biodiversity Off-Setting Assessment.
- 3.7 The Local Plan Habitat Survey is not a new Study which has to be undertaken, with similar undertaken in the past to inform previous Local Plans. In 2019 consultants were appointed to undertake the Study at a cost of £48,247.63, and prior to that in 2011 consultants were appointed at a cost of £18,375. However, since the last was commissioned in 2019, the Environment Act (2021) has come into force which has meant that the methodology for assessing sites for their biodiversity value has changed significantly to the UK Habitats Classification System which is a much more rigorous assessment with further recording requirements and has to be completed by specialist ecologists. As such the costs for carrying out such studies has increased substantially.
- 3.8 The Burbage Common and Wood Off-Site Biodiversity Unit Assessment element of the Study will provide the Borough Council with a comprehensive document which follows the latest Government Guidance and legislation in regard to Biodiversity Net Gain and in particular off-site gains so that the Council can take an informed decision in relation to registering Burbage Common and Woodlands as a site for biodiversity units to offset impacts upon biodiversity as a result of development. This part of the document is not normally part of the Local Plan evidence base, and not required in this regard

instead being linked to wider Council aspirations over biodiversity net gain and linked to existing open space management, however combining this with the Habitat Survey provided efficiencies compared to separate commissions for this work and means that Burbage Common can be allocated in the new Local Plan as a strategic off setting site.

- 3.9 The cost for the Local Plan Habitat Survey work was £105,133.93 and for the Burbage Common and Woodland element £24,000. This is a total cost for both documents of £129,133.98. This overspend contributes to the majority of the Local Plan budget overspend for 2024/25. This overspend is for a document that is now fully up to date with existing legislation and also includes a c. £24k addition for the Burbage Common additional evidence.
- 3.10 In addition to the Local Plan Habitat Survey & Burbage Common and Woodland Biodiversity Off-Setting Assessment, other evidence progressed in 2024/25 includes the joint transport assessment, being undertaken jointly with three other Local Planning Authorities, a whole plan viability assessment, infrastructure development plan, strategic flood risk assessment and sustainability appraisal amongst others.
- 3.11 Moving forward to 2025/26, the Local Plan budget includes an identified budget of £202k for evidence. In addition to this the council has recently received Local Plan delivery funding of £227,962.50 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to assist with Local Plan preparation in light of the new December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework and amendments made to the standard method for calculating housing need.
- 3.12 Expectations of funding delivery included progression of the Local Plan to submission to Government by December 2026. This grant funding applies to Councils current at Regulation 18 stage in their plan making process, with the Council undertaking a Regulation 18 consultation in July-September 2024.
- 3.13 A new Local Development Scheme, setting out the new timetable for the Local Plan, was published in March 2025 and submitted to MHCLG. This sets out two further stages of public consultation on the draft Local Plan, ahead of submission to MHCLG ahead of the December 2026 deadline. The Local Plan would then be examined by an independent examiner in 2027 ahead of adoption by the Council in late 2027 or early 2028.
- 3.14 The grant funding provided is expected to be spent on additional evidence documents, required to progress the Local Plan and taking into account the changes of the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework and the increase in housing need. The Council's annual housing need has been increased from 433 dwellings per annum (dpa) to now 659dpa, a 50% increase in housing need that will be required to be met in the new Local Plan. This additional housing need does not take into account meeting unmet need from Leicester City, nor any requirement for a buffer.

3.15 The spending of the grant funding will be monitored quarterly by MHCLG, with flexibility to spend the funding on updating existing evidence documents, new evidence documents or additional resourcing to the Planning Policy Team. With this additional funding, no overspend is currently anticipated for 2025/26 for Local Plan evidence.

3.16 The Planning Policy Team will continue to keep Members updated on new Local Plan evidence documents, including presentations and briefing notes on outcomes, and the Local Plan will be progressed through Council as it moves towards the next round of consultation in the autumn.

#### **4. Exemptions in accordance with the Access to Information procedure rules**

4.1 Open

#### **5. Financial implications [CS]**

5.1 The 20024/25 Local Plan budget was £211,571 with actual spend for the year of £374,373. The overspend of £162,802 was largely due to the Local Plan Habitat Survey & Burbage Common and Woodland Biodiversity Off-Setting Assessment.

5.2 For 20025/26 the Local Plan budget is £202,292. In addition, funding of £227,962 was received from MHCLG in March 2025 and will be spent on additional evidence documents (see 3.14). A carry forward has been submitted to carry the funding forward to 2025/26.

5.3 The additional £227,962 will be added to the Local Plan budget once carry forwards have been approved by Council.

#### **6. Legal implications**

6.1 None

#### **7. Corporate Plan implications**

7.1 The objectives of this report align to the following corporate plan objective:

<u>People</u>	
2.	Maximise people's potential through employment and skills support
<u>Place</u>	
2.	Keep our town centres vibrant and viable
4.	Improve the quality of existing homes and enable the delivery of affordable housing
<u>Prosperity</u>	

1.	Boost economic growth and regeneration by encouraging investment that will provide new jobs and places to live and work all over the borough
2.	Support the regeneration of our town centres and villages
3.	Support our rural communities
4.	Work with partners to raise aspirations and boost opportunities for training, employment, and housing
6.	Ensure businesses are supported to safeguard and maintain local employment opportunities
7.	Provide direct investment in economic opportunities where opportunities arise and subject to the business case

## 8. Consultation

8.1 None

## 9. Risk implications

9.1 It is the council's policy to proactively identify and manage significant risks which may prevent delivery of business objectives. There is a specific Risk section in the Local Development Scheme relating to the production of the Local Plan which covers issues such as staff resources, legislation, politics, external capacity, finances etc.

9.2 It is not possible to eliminate or manage all risks all of the time and risks will remain which have not been identified. However, it is the officer's opinion based on the information available, that the significant risks associated with this decision / project have been identified, assessed and that controls are in place to manage them effectively.

9.3 The following significant risks associated with this report / decisions were identified from this assessment:

### Management of significant (Net Red) risks

Risk description	Mitigating actions	Owner
Delivery of the Local Plan	Local Development Scheme kept updated annually, Regular update reports to SLT and Planning Policy Member Working Group. Officers attend 3x different levels of county wide strategic planning meetings to discuss progress and share evidence base	Head of Planning

## **10. Knowing your community – equality and rural implications**

10.1 The funding will ensure continued service delivery to progress the Local Plan.

## **11. Climate implications**

11.1 Service delivery is continually informed by decarbonisation objectives.

## **12. Corporate implications**

12.1 By submitting this report, the report author has taken the following into account:

- Community safety implications
- Environmental implications
- ICT implications
- Asset management implications
- Procurement implications
- Human resources implications
- Planning implications
- Data protection implications
- Voluntary sector

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Background papers: None

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