

LOCAL PLAN FOR SLOUGH – SPATIAL STRATEGY

Promoting the cross border expansion of Slough to meet unmet housing needs

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is preparing a new Local Plan for Slough. An important part of this is the Spatial Strategy which will set out what the pattern, scale and quality of development will be in the Borough. .
- 1.2 It is proposed that the Spatial Strategy should have the following five key components:
 - **Delivering** major comprehensive redevelopment within the “Centre of Slough”;
 - **Selecting** other key locations for appropriate sustainable development;
 - **Enhancing** our distinct suburbs, vibrant neighbourhood centres and environmental assets;
 - **Protecting** the “Strategic Gap” between Slough and Greater London;
 - **Promoting** the cross border expansion of Slough to meet unmet housing needs.
- 1.3 This report explains why it is considered necessary to promote the cross border expansion of Slough to meet unmet housing needs. It should be noted that because this will be outside of the Local Plan area, any proposed development could only be delivered by the relevant Local Planning Authority in its development plan.

2 Context

- 2.1 Slough has an overall need to build 17,860 houses in the Local Plan period from 2016 to 2036. It is currently calculated that there will be a shortfall of around 5,000 housing. Whilst this is mainly due to a shortage of land it has to be recognised that the scale of unmet needs is also affected by decisions made about the proposed Spatial Strategy.
- 2.2 The overall guiding principle behind the Strategy is that that development should be located in the most accessible locations which have the greatest capacity to absorb growth and deliver social and environmental benefits. This means that the bulk of the new housing is directed to the Centre of Slough. We have identified sites where around 9,000 dwellings could be built in the plan period. This involves having very high density development which will predominantly provide flats. The ability to deliver this scale of development within the “square mile” hasn’t been fully tested. But it is considered to be the maximum that it is practical to deliver.

- 2.3 We have sought to find sites elsewhere in the Borough as part of the Selected Key Locations component of the Spatial Strategy. Although there are a number of individual sites, it has only been able to find one new area at Cippenham that is capable of being comprehensively redeveloped for housing. The search for sites was carried out on the basis that there would be no further loss of public open space or Existing Business Areas which are needed to support the Local economy.
- 2.4 We have identified 10 sites which could possibly be released from the Green Belt for housing. These will have to be the subject of a separate consultation exercise once the results of the Wider Area Growth Study have been agreed.
- 2.5 Because of the need to retain the stock of existing family housing, the Spatial Strategy has decided that there should be no loss of these in the Enhancing the Suburbs component of the plan. There will, however, continue to be an ongoing supply of new housing from small sites.
- 2.6 It is not considered that the Colnbrook and Poyle area is suitable for housing because of environmental issues including noise from the nearby Heathrow airport. This is one of the reasons why one of the components of the Spatial Strategy is Protecting the Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London. Whether this area is suitable for development will be tested in the Wider Area Growth Study.
- 2.7 One of the principles of the Spatial Strategy is that unmet needs should be met as close as possible to where they arise. As explained above, it has not been possible to find sites to accommodate all of Slough's housing needs within the Borough. There is already a shortfall of housing in southern Buckinghamshire. There is also a need to rebalance the housing market in Slough in order to provide more family housing. It is for these reasons that the Cross Border Expansion of Slough is being promoted as a component of the Spatial Strategy.

Wider Area Growth Study

- 2.8 The "Wider Area Growth Study" is a government funded study which is intended to address issues arising from growth that is anticipated across the area. The work has been jointly commissioned by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, the former Chiltern and South Bucks District Councils and Slough Borough Council.
- 2.9 It recognises that Slough currently considers it will not be able to meet all of its existing and future housing needs within its boundary and so there is a need to identify "functional geographies" or areas where this 'need' can be accommodated regardless of administrative boundaries. The purpose of the study is to identify the potential locations that could accommodate the future

housing need growth of the Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead core, in line with national policy.

- 2.10 The purpose of Part 1 was to define a broad 'study area', in which new housing development could provide reasonable substitutes for homes in the core places. This was carried out by consultants PBA who published their report in June 2019.
- 2.11 This concluded that the future housing needs of Slough are best met as close to Slough as possible, in areas where house prices are, or house prices in new developments could be, no higher than in Slough and close to areas that Slough residents commute out to. As a result the Study had identified a very small narrow area of search which consist of the southern part of South Bucks south of the M40. It also included Hillingdon Borough. This was not because it would necessarily be expected to take net migration from Slough but because the inter relationship is such that if more housing was built in Hillingdon the net migration outflow to Slough is likely to be reduced.
- 2.12 As part of the work on the Growth Study a Local Housing Needs Assessment for RBWM, Slough and South Bucks Local Authorities was commissioned from GL Hearn. This suggested that that as a result of the proposed distribution of housing in the Chiltern and South Bucks Local Plan there could be a shortfall of 4,300 houses in the southern part of South Bucks over the Plan period. This would be in addition to the unmet need from Slough. Part 2 of the Wider Area Growth Study is now being carried out by Stantec. This will look at housing needs, supply, capacity and constraints in the study area in order to identify specific locations where housing development could be deliverable and sustainable.
- 2.13 The report is due to be completed by the end of the year and will then have to be agreed by all of the Councils.
- 2.14 The Council has previously promoted the "Northern Expansion of Slough" which remains its preferred option. However, in order not the prejudice the results of the Wider Growth Area Study, the Spatial Strategy is not promoting any particular form of development as part of the cross border expansion of Slough to meet housing needs.

Housing Needs

- 2.15 It should be noted that the Council has always promoted the expansion of Slough as the most sustainable way of meeting all of the unmet housing needs in the area with priority given to those South Bucks. As explained above it is suggested that there is a shortfall of 4,300 dwellings in the southern part of South Bucks. The current estimate of a 5,000 shortfall in Slough, as shown in

the Housing Trajectory, is in addition to this..

- 2.16 The Government has recently published proposals for changing the standard methodology for calculating housing needs. This would result in Slough's need being reduced from 893 a year to 597. If these changes, which are currently out to public consultation, were to be implemented it would mean that Slough would have to provide around 6,000 less houses and would no longer technically have a shortfall..
- 2.17 Using the Government's new figures South Buck's needs remain the same. This means the shortfall of 4,300 in the south of the former district remains unchanged. At the same time Chiltern's unmet needs would go up from 343 to 619 a year. The Government's new figures would require Aylesbury to build an extra 801 houses a year which is significant because this would mean that it would no longer be able to accommodate the housing that was planned to be exported there from Chiltern and South Bucks in the Local Plan.
- 2.18 The Government's new methodology has proved to be controversial and it is not certain that it will be introduced. The use of the housing stock as the base line for the calculation is likely to underestimate Slough's housing needs because it doesn't take account of current levels of overcrowding. As explained above there is also the need to rebalance the Slough housing market with a wider range of housing, including family homes. This is one of the reasons why the Council has been promoting the new "garden suburb".
- 2.19 Whichever methodology is used for calculating housing needs, there is still a strong case for promoting the cross border expansion of Slough to meet local housing needs. This is why it is a key component of the Slough Spatial Strategy.

Conclusions

- 2.20 Although the expansion of Slough is outside of the scope of the Slough Local Plan, it remains a component of the Spatial Strategy in order to meet local housing needs. Exactly how this could be delivered will have to be decided once the results of the Wider Area Growth Study have been agreed and further joint working can take place.

Slough Housing Trajectory Graph 2016-2036

