

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Planning Committee **DATE:** 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021  
**CONTACT OFFICER:** Paul Stimpson, Planning Policy Lead Officer  
**(For all Enquiries)** (01753) 875820  
**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR DECISION**

#### **LOCAL PLAN SPATIAL STRATEGY – INITIAL REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

##### **1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the responses to the public consultation exercise on the Spatial Strategy which was held between November and January.

##### **2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to resolve that:
- a) The initial results of the public consultation on the Spatial Strategy be noted;
  - b) A full report on the Response to Public Consultation be produced and published.

##### **3a. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Part of the Spatial Strategy is to enhance neighbourhoods which will help to implement Priority 3

– *Strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods.*

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##### **3b Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

Ensuring that needs are met within the local area will make a positive contribution to the following SJWS priorities:

- *Economy and Skills*
- *Regeneration and Environment*
- *Housing*

##### **3c Five Year Plan Outcomes**

The proposed Spatial Strategy for the Local Plan will contribute to the following Five Year Plan outcomes:

- **Outcome 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay.** The Preferred Spatial Strategy will seek to protect and enhance the local environment.
- **Outcomes 4: Our residents will live in good quality homes.** The Preferred Spatial Strategy will seek to ensure that we have a balanced housing market that can meet the range of housing needs in Slough.
- **Outcome 5: Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investments to provide opportunities for our residents.** The Preferred Spatial Strategy will promote areas for employment growth in Slough.

## **Other Implications**

### (a) Financial

There are no financial implications.

### (b) Risk Management

**Table 1 - Risk Management**

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Risk/Threat/Opportunity</i>	<i>Mitigation(s)</i>
That the Committee approves the recommendation.	Failure to consider the results of the public consultation on the Spatial Strategy would undermine the preparation of the Local Plan	Agree the recommendations.

### (c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act Implications as a result of this report.

## **4 Supporting Information**

### Introduction

- 4.1 The Spatial Strategy is an important part of the Local Plan which provides the vision and sets out what the pattern, scale and nature of development will be in Slough.
- 4.2 A consultation on the Spatial Strategy for the Local Plan for Slough was held between the 9<sup>th</sup> November and 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021. It had to be extended because of problems with the Council's website at the launch which meant that it had to go on beyond Christmas.
- 4.3 This report sets an initial analysis of the results of public consultation. A full report will be produced and published in due course.

### Level of response to the Consultation

- 4.4 Because of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic it was not possible to carry out a traditional consultation exercise with exhibitions and meetings. The

two main methods of communicating with people were through emailing everyone on the Local Plan database and by delivering a leaflet to every household in Slough. This was supplemented by adverts in the paper, press releases and a social media campaign. A new consultation hub website was set up to make it as easy as possible to find out more about the plan and its supporting documents and make their views known.

- 4.5 Planning Officers made presentations to a number of online meetings for organisations that requested them.
- 4.6 A total of 310 responses were received, mainly through the consultation hub, but also by email and letter.

**Table 2 - Method of participation**

<b>Method of Participation</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Online Consultation Hub	237	76.45%
Email	65	20.97%
Email & Online Consultation Hub	3	0.97%
Petition	1	0.32%
Post	4	1.29%

- 4.7 This level of response is very disappointing but it is consistent with the general lack of public engagement that we tend to get with planning matters in Slough. It is considered that we got enough responses to the questions that we asked to at least get a flavour of what the public may be thinking.

**Table 3 - Participants by location**

<b>Participant Location</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Slough Borough	151	63.71%
South Bucks District	83	35.02%
Others	3	1.27%

- 4.8 We also got a good response from statutory consultees, organisations and land owners which will help to inform the next stages in the preparation of the Local Plan.

**Table 4 - Participants' category**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Slough Residents	151	48.71%
Residents from outside Slough	86	27.74%
Statutory Consultees, Internal Consultees and Other organizations	41	13.23%
Developer/Land owner	32	10.32%

- 4.9 The following sections set out an initial analysis of what can be described as the “public” and “professional” response to the consultation, with the former

mainly being expressed in the answers to the eight questions that we asked about the Spatial Strategy. .

#### 4.10 Overall Strategy

4.11 The purpose of the Spatial Strategy is to decide “what goes where” in the most sustainable way. In doing so it has a number of guiding principles. These are that:

- We should aim to meet as many of our needs as possible in Slough, or as close as possible to where the needs arise.
- Development should be located in the most accessible locations, which have the greatest capacity to absorb growth and deliver social and environmental benefits.
- We should promote inclusive growth with more of the wealth generated in Slough staying in Slough.

4.12 As a result Slough should be a place where people want to “*work, rest, play and stay*”.

4.13 There was general support for this overall approach with nobody suggesting a radical new strategy. This is important because it means that we can now proceed with the next stages in the production of the Local Plan.

4.14 The overall strategy is also a continuation of the principles set out in the Core Strategy, albeit with a much larger scale of development. This means that there is no need for any new interim policies and so we can continue to apply the policies in the Local Plan, Core Strategy and Site Allocations document in the short term.

#### Housing Shortfall

4.15 The Spatial Strategy envisages that there will be a shortfall of around 5,000 houses in Slough over the Local Plan period. This is one of the most contentious aspects of the strategy.

4.16 One of the standard questions that we asked was “*Do you think it is acceptable to plan for a shortfall of homes within the Borough boundary and promote the cross border expansion instead?*”

4.17 The results showed that around 59% of respondents agreed and 41% disagreed.

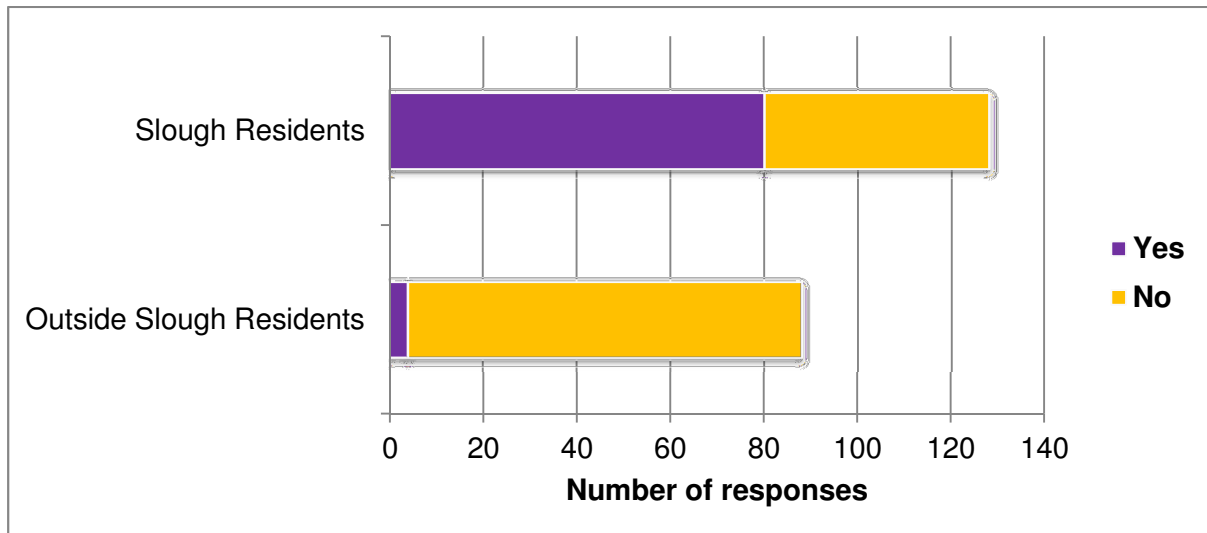
4.18 We did not ask a specific question about Green Belt policy but it was clear from the comments that this was one of the main factors which influenced people’s views. The response was also affected by where people lived. The table below shows that residents outside of Slough were overwhelmingly opposed to the

cross border expansion of Slough.

**Table 5 - Residents' response to the housing shortfall**

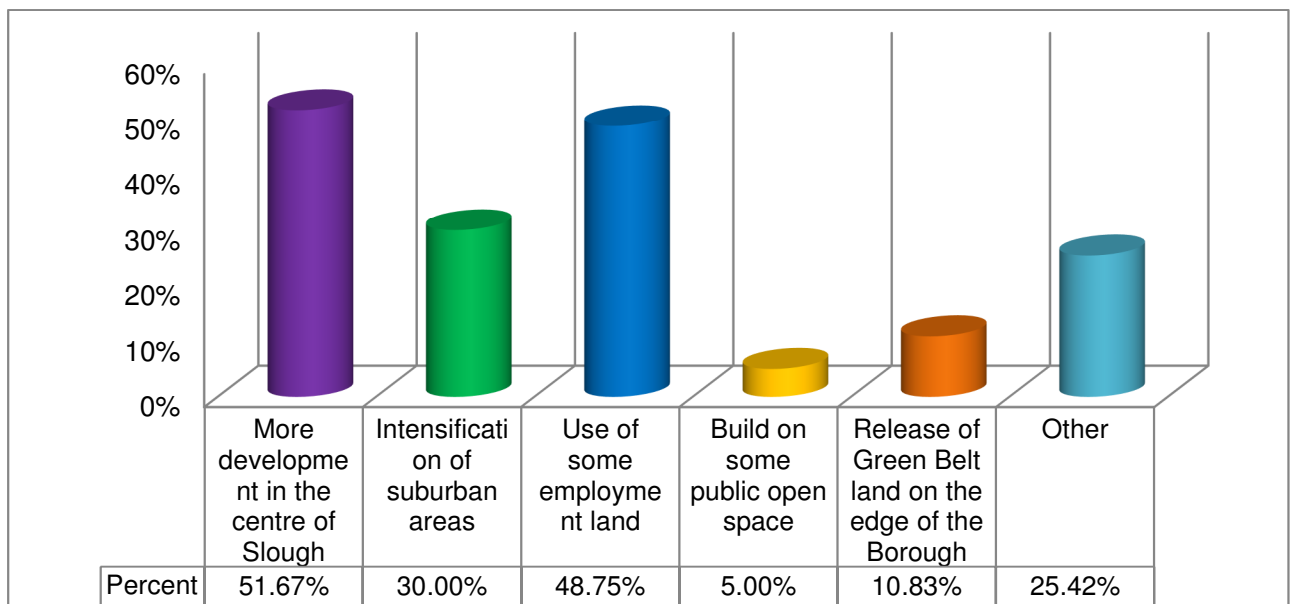
Option	Slough Residents	Outside Slough Residents
Yes	62.50%	4.55%
No	37.50%	95.45%

**Diagram 1 - Residents' response to the housing shortfall**



4.19 One of the other questions that we asked was “If you think that more homes should be built in Slough to meet local needs where should it be?”. The diagram below shows that there was a range of suggestions as to where this should go.

**Table 6 - Place for more homes in Slough**



- 4.20 Although the Spatial Strategy was not seeking to make site allocations at this stage it should be noted that only one new site was suggested within the urban area of Slough which had not been considered before. The location of the sites that were suggested in the urban area are shown in Appendix A.
- 4.21 The critical point is that, while it may be possible to continue to reduce the shortfall of housing in Slough, it is very unlikely that sufficient brownfield land can be found for 5,000 more houses. Even if more sites can be found there is some doubt as to whether it would be possible to actually build them at the required rate or deliver the range of housing that is needed.
- 4.22 As a result the Local Plan will have to continue to be prepared on the basis that there will be a shortfall in housing within Slough.

### Wealth Creation and Employment

- 4.23 The Spatial Strategy aims to create 15,000 new jobs in Slough but, because of a shortage of land, has not been able to identify a range of sites for achieving this. As a result it is heavily dependent upon creating new office jobs in the Centre of Slough.
- 4.24 One of the questions asked was “*In order to create more jobs in Slough, can you suggest any alternative to office development?*” The results of this are shown in the table below which represents the most common answers.

**Table 7 - Wealth creation and employment**

<b>Most Repeated Ideas for the creation of jobs</b>
Leisure and culture
More retail shops and Revitalising the High Street
Revitalising the High Street
Big shopping Centre
Green industries and Light manufacturing
Incentivise businesses to come to Slough
Flexible/Rentable workspace
Education
Hospitality
Reuse of existing buildings empty homes/commercial spaces/offices
Warehouse, Distribution, Logistic
Airport-related development
SME and entrepreneurship investment
Apprenticeships Schemes
More Offices in Trading Estate
Retail parks

- 4.25 It should be noted that a number of new sites for warehousing were identified in the Colnbrook and Poyle area. These are considered in the section on the

Strategic Gap below.

### Key Components of the Spatial Strategy

4.26 The Spatial Strategy has five key components. These can be summarised as:

- **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.

4.27 The response to each of these key components is set out below.

#### Delivering major comprehensive redevelopment in the “Centre of Slough”

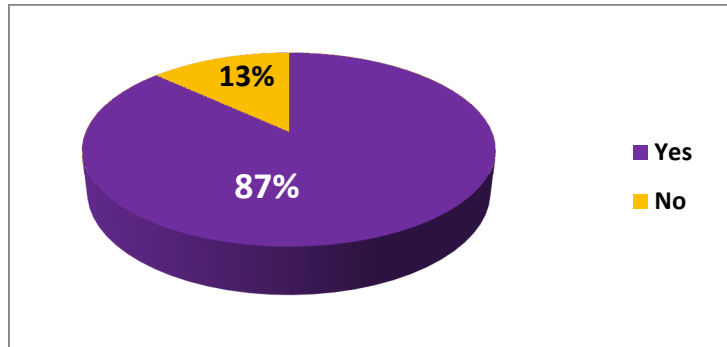
4.28 The overall guiding principle for the Spatial Strategy is that development should be located in the most accessible locations which have the greatest capacity to absorb growth and deliver social and environmental benefits.

4.29 As a result concentrating development in the Centre of Slough is at the heart of the Spatial Strategy. The “square mile”, as it is sometimes referred to, will provide the bulk of housing that will be built in the Borough. The proposed expansion of the Central Business District with new office development provides the main opportunity for employment growth in Slough.

4.30 The Spatial Strategy assumes that there will be significant reduction in the amount of retail floorspace in the Centre of Slough but seeks to ensure that there will be a vibrant quality retail offer which can attract new business, meet the needs of future residents in the centre and continue to serve the existing local community.

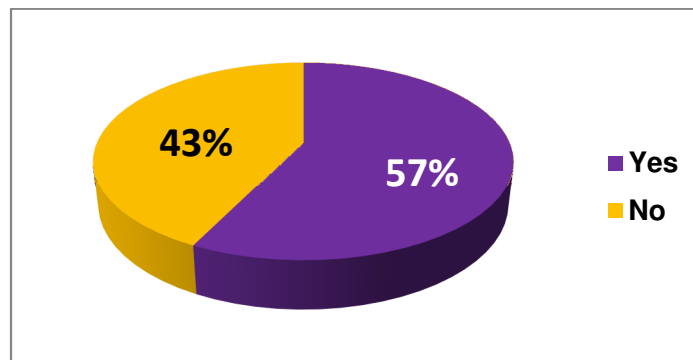
4.31 Three of the standard questions asked in the consultation related to the centre of Slough. The first asked “*Do you think that the Centre of Slough is the right place for major developments?*” 87% of the people who answered this question agreed with this.

Diagram 2 - Centre of Slough (Questions 1)



4.32 The second question asked “Do you think that the Centre of Slough has more capacity for major developments than is being proposed?” Around 57% of people thought that there was scope for more major development in the Centre of Slough.

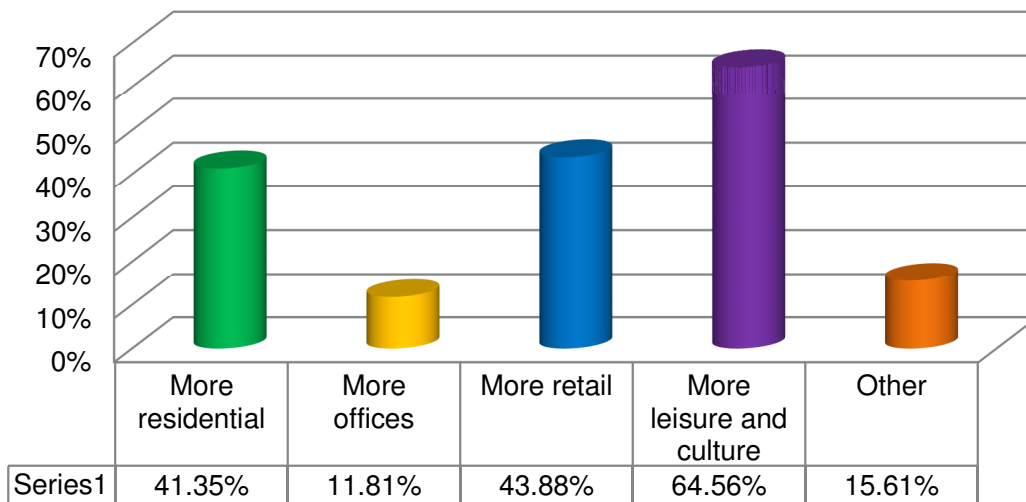
Diagram 3 - Centre of Slough (Questions 2)



4.33 The third question was “Do you think that the Centre of Slough should have a different mix of uses in the future?” The results below shows that there was high demand for more leisure and culture, more retail and residential within the Centre of Slough.



Diagram 4 - Centre of Slough (Questions 3)



4.34 It should be noted that since responding to the consultation, British Land have decided to adopt a new approach to the redevelopment of the Queensmere and Observatory shopping centres. They have written a letter stating that they propose to have a residential led scheme with up to 2,500 units. The level of workspace would be reduced to 50,000m<sup>2</sup> and there would be around 15,000m<sup>2</sup> of retail / food and beverage. This could have a number of implications for the mix of uses in the centre of Slough and the Local Plan in general.

4.35 The other significant change since the consultation ended is that it has been announced that the Akzo Nobel site is now proposed to be developed with data centres rather than warehousing. This would reduce traffic in the centre of Slough but also reduce still further the opportunity for a range of new jobs.

Selecting other Key Locations for appropriate sustainable development

4.36 The Spatial Strategy recognised that, because of the shortage of land, there are limited opportunities for major development outside of the centre of Slough. The major employment areas such as Slough Trading Estate and the Poyle Trading Estate are already fully built up and so any a development here would have to be in the form of redevelopment.

4.37 The Spatial Strategy identified opportunities for some new housing in Chalvey and in Cippenham. There is some support for the later site but it has not been possible to come up with a scheme that deals with the site constraints and flooding issues.

4.38 There wasn't a specific question related to this part of the Strategy in the consultation but a number of sites were put forward for development.

4.39 SEGRO have once again promoted the development of the land adjacent to

Kennedy Park which currently suffers from contamination.

- 4.40 National Grid have identified the land adjacent to the sub station in Keel Drive as being capable of being used as part of the regeneration of Chalvey.
- 4.41 The Councils Housing Department continues to promote the development of the land at Weekes Drive for housing. Part of this is public open space and so would be contrary to the policy of protecting this.
- 4.42 The most interesting new proposal to come forward is the proposal to redevelop the Marriott Hotel on the London Road in Langley. There are a number of environmental problems with this site, but it could provide the opportunity for major housing development. There is also the opportunity for some retail on the site but it is not particularly well located to become a new neighbourhood centre.
- 4.43 The overall conclusion remains that there is limited scope for identifying new Selected Key Locations for development within the urban area.

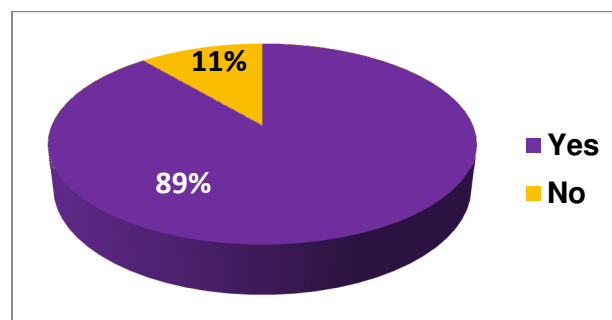
#### Green Belt Releases in Slough

- 4.44 It is recognised that there may have to be Green Belt releases in Slough in order to meet housing needs and the need for family housing in particular. Ten possible sites were identified in the Issues and Options consultation and these sites were flagged up again in the Spatial Strategy.
- 4.45 It was not considered possible to make any decisions about these sites until the Wider Area Growth Study has been completed. Unfortunately this has been delayed partly because the new Buckinghamshire Authority has decided to withdraw from the joint working. Part 2 of the study is, however, now continuing using the methodology that was previously agreed and the initial results should be available in the next few months. This should allow us to carry out a public consultation on the possible Green Belt sites within Slough in the summer.
- 4.46 There were a number of objections to the principle of Green Belt releases and some objections to the individual sites as part of the responses to the Spatial Strategy. It is not proposed to respond to these now but we will take account of them when we carry out the next consultation in the summer.
- 4.47 Proposals were submitted by landowners for some of the possible sites at Wexham, Rochford Gardens, Market Lane and south of Blenheim Road. It is also not proposed to respond to these but they will be taken into account when preparing the document for consultation in the summer.

#### Protecting the Suburbs Enhancing our distinct suburbs, vibrant neighbourhood centres and environmental assets;

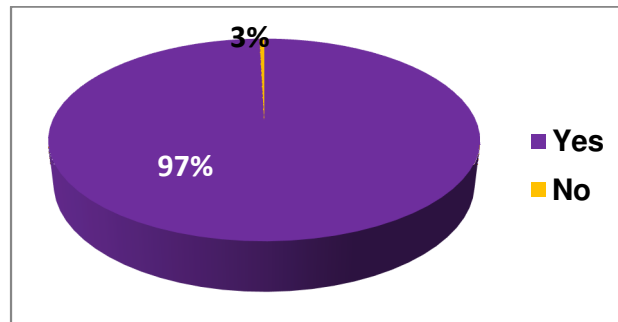
- 4.48 Enhancing the areas where most people live is an important part of the Spatial Strategy. The “Protecting the Suburbs” study showed why it was not practical, viable, sustainable or desirable to allow any of the family housing to be lost. There is, however, scope for redevelopment on non-garden land such as garage courts and other brownfield sites.
- 4.49 It is also important that we protect and enhance the open spaces, parks and other assets of community value within the residential areas in order to support healthy and active lifestyles.
- 4.50 At the same time we want our district/neighbourhood centres to be vibrant and have an improved range of facilities within them so that people are able to “live locally” if they want to, without the need to travel.
- 4.51 One of the questions asked was *“Do you think that the plan should protect the family housing and distinct character and environment of the suburbs?”* There was strong support for this, with 89% agreeing.

**Diagram 5 - Protecting the family housing, distinct character and environment of the suburb**



- 4.52 Another question was *“Do you agree that we should protect and enhance local facilities so that residents can make more use of what is in their local neighbourhood?”* The results show that the respondents overwhelmingly support this approach. This supports one of the key themes in the Spatial Strategy of enabling people to “live locally”.

Diagram 6 - Living Locally

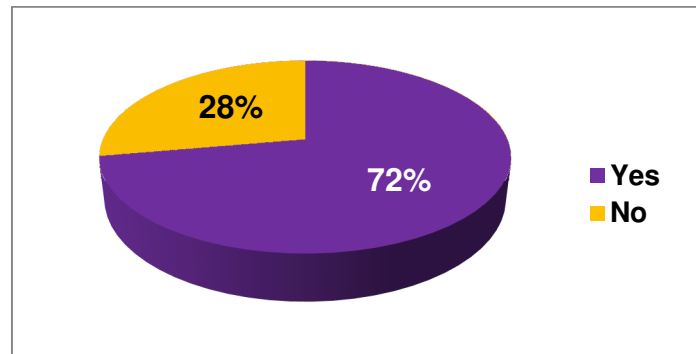


- 4.53 Protecting the suburbs does not appear to be a particularly controversial issue, even though it is one of the biggest policy decisions being made in the Spatial Strategy. It should be noted that this was supported not just by the public but also by organisations such as the Home Builders Federation. Where there were concerns, these were mainly about ensuring that redevelopment could continue on brown field sites such as garage courts which are allowed under the Strategy.
- 4.54 It should be noted, however, that amongst those people who did not agree that Slough should plan for a shortfall in housing, building in the suburbs was an alternative option put forward by 18%.
- 4.55 Nevertheless it is considered that the preparation of the Local Plan should continue on the basis that there will not be a significant supply of housing from the suburban residential areas which are needed for family housing.

#### Protecting the Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London

- 4.56 For the purposes of the Local Plan it is now assumed that proposals for the third runway will not come forward in the short to medium term which means that if they do, they can be dealt with by a review of the plan.
- 4.57 As a result the Spatial Strategy seeks to protect the Green Belt, Colne Valley Park and Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London. This will also effectively safeguard land from being developed which could be needed for the expansion of the airport in the future.
- 4.58 One of the questions was *“Do you think that it is right to restrict development in the Colnbrook and Pyle area in order to protect the Strategic Gap, Green Belt and Colne Valley Park.*
- 4.59 There was considerable support for protecting the Strategic gap with 72% agreeing. It should be noted that many respondents appear to support this in order to prevent the expansion of Heathrow.

Diagram 6 – Strategic Gap Question



4.60 It should be noted that there were a number of proposals from land owners for employment and housing development throughout the Colnbrook and Poyle area as shown on Appendix A. It was argued that this is needed to meet the needs for warehousing in particular. This shows how much pressure there is for development in this already fragmented area. It also shows how difficult it would be to make exceptions to the restraint policy without risking large scale development in the Colnbrook and Poyle area and compromising the ability of the airport to expand in the future.

#### Promoting the Cross Border Expansion of Slough to meet unmet housing needs

- 4.61 The question about “*whether it was acceptable to plan for a shortfall of housing in the Borough and promote the cross border expansion of Slough*” has been considered above.
- 4.62 A number of sites outside of the Borough have been submitted for development as shown in Appendix A. The Spatial Strategy does not, however, seek to identify where this development should go because this will be partly considered by the Growth Study. As a result it is not proposed to comment on any of the sites at this stage.

#### Future Work

- 4.63 It is acknowledged that there are some gaps in our evidence base. This is partly the result of uncertainty caused by Covid-19 and the current difficulty that we have in predicting the future. There has also been some uncertainty about Government policy and housing numbers in particular.
- 4.64 Respondents have also flagged up the need for more technical work to be carried out in a number of areas listed below. It is important to note that the evidence base for the Local Plan has to be “proportionate”.
- 4.65 We have secured some consultancy time from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and one of the areas that they will be able to advise on is what the priorities should be. This will inform our detailed work programme for the next

financial year.

- 4.66 The Spatial Strategy did not make any site allocations or contain any policies. An important part of the future work stream will be identifying sites for development and developing the policies that will be necessary to implement the Spatial Strategy and complete the Local Plan. This will involve ensuring that the plan is properly coordinated with all of the Council's other strategies. In order to help to achieve this a Local Plan Board is being set up which will be chaired by the Chief Executive.
- 4.67 One pressing issue that needs to be dealt with is dealing with the impact of development upon the Burnham Beeches SAC which has been identified in the consultation and the Council's Appropriate Assessment. It is proposed that mitigation will be provided in Upton Court Park and Supplementary Planning Guidance will be drawn up to show how this can be delivered. It is envisaged that a consultation on this could take place during the summer at the same time as the Green Belt consultation.
- 4.68 The proposed future work programme for the preparation of the Local Plan will be reported to a future meeting of this Committee once we have a clearer understanding of what evidence needs to be produced and we know what resources will be available.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 The Spatial Strategy is an important part of the Slough Local Plan which will set out what the pattern, scale and quality of development will be in Slough. The results of public consultation show that there is no need to change the overall strategy and the detailed comments can be used to inform the next stages of the preparation of the Local Plan.

## **6 Background Papers**

Spatial Strategy Consultation November 2020

## **7 Appendices**

Appendix A – Figure (1) The location of the suggested sites for development.

Figure 1- The location of suggested sites

