

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee **DATE** 29th July 2020
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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR DECISION**

LOCAL PLAN SPATIAL STRATEGY OVERALL APPROACH

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to explain the overall approach that has been taken to develop the Preferred Spatial Strategy for the Slough Local Plan which will be the subject of public consultation in November. It also seeks approval of the five key elements of the Preferred Spatial Strategy.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

The Committee is requested to resolve that

- a) The five key elements set out in paragraph 5.24 be agreed as the basis for the preparation of the preferred Spatial Strategy for the Slough Local Plan.
- b) A report setting out the proposed detailed content of the preferred Spatial Strategy be brought back to this Committee for consideration.

3 The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

Ensuring that needs are met within the local area will have an impact upon the following SJWS priorities:

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

3b Five Year Plan Outcomes

The proposed Spatial Strategy for the Local Plan will have impact upon the 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.

4 Other Implications

(a) Financial

There are no financial implications.

(b) Risk Management

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Risk/Threat/Opportunity</i>	<i>Mitigation(s)</i>
That the Committee approves the recommendation.	Failure to agree the proposed overall approach for the Preferred Spatial Strategy will affect the Council's ability to bring forward the Local Plan and plan for development in the most sustainable way.	Agree the recommendations.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

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

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 The proposed timetable for the preparation of the Preferred Spatial Strategy for the Local Plan was agreed at the meeting on 24th June 2020. This will involve carrying out public consultation on the Preferred Strategy in November and

December and will be an important step towards meeting the Government's deadline of having an adopted Local Plan by the end of 2023.

- 5.2 The Spatial Strategy will set out what the pattern, scale and quality of development will be in Slough. This involves making sufficient provision to meet housing, employment and other needs whilst at the same time conserving the natural, built and historic environment. It should be noted that environmental issues and the need to deal with climate change are embedded in the choices in the Spatial Strategy. This includes locating development in the most accessible locations, reducing the need to travel by car and reducing congestion. The overall aim is to decide "what goes where" in the most sustainable way.
- 5.3 The Local Plan has to be informed throughout its preparation by a Sustainability Appraisal. This demonstrates how the plan has relevant economic, social and environmental objectives and considered alternative options which reduce significant adverse impacts upon these objectives. The ongoing findings of the Sustainability Appraisal have been fed into the production of the Spatial Strategy and will be published for public consultation at the same time as the plan.
- 5.4 The Spatial Strategy is just the first part of the Local Plan. It does not contain any policies. A full set of Development Management policies will be included in the final version of the Local Plan. The Spatial Strategy does, however, seek to identify the type of policies that may be needed in order to implement the proposals and mitigate any adverse impacts.
- 5.5 We are not bringing forward proposals for minerals, waste or gypsy and travellers at this stage. These issues are not considered to have a significant impact upon the Spatial Strategy and will be dealt with at a later date.

Revised Spatial Strategy

- 5.6 The starting point for the development of the Spatial Strategy was the work carried out for the Issues and Options consultation in 2017. This identified a number of options for development. The conclusions from this were that there are "no reasonable options, or combinations of options which could accommodate all of Slough's housing and employment needs within the Borough".
- 5.7 An "emerging" Preferred Spatial Strategy was agreed in 2018. The five key elements of this were:
 - **Delivering** major comprehensive redevelopment within the "Centre of Slough";

- **Selecting** other key locations for appropriate development;
- **Protecting** the built and natural environment of Slough including the suburbs;
- **Accommodating** the proposed third runway at Heathrow and mitigating the impact;
- **Promoting** the northern expansion of Slough in the form of a “Garden Suburb”.

5.8 It is proposed that the revised Spatial Strategy should be based upon this subject to a number of changes which take account of changes in circumstances.

5.9 The main difference is that it is now assumed that there will not be any expansion of Heathrow in the short to medium term and so the Spatial Strategy does not have to plan to accommodate the proposed third runway. As a result a new strategy is needed for the Colnbrook and Poyle area. In the absence of any policy support or any demonstrable need for airport related development it is considered that the most appropriate approach is to revert back to restraining development in order to protect the Green Belt, Colne Valley Park and Strategic Gap between Slough and Greater London.

5.10 Although we cannot formally safeguard land that may be needed for the expansion of Heathrow and associated development, this approach will effectively achieve this. Any future proposals for the expansion of the airport can then be considered in a review of the Local Plan.

5.11 The Wider Area Growth Study is seeking to identify major sites that could accommodate unmet housing and employment needs. The area of search includes the Colnbrook and Poyle. As a result we may have to reconsider what happens to this area if the Consultant’s report recommends that development should take place there.

5.12 As explained below, the main principle behind Spatial Strategy remains one of delivering major comprehensive redevelopment within the “Centre of Slough”. No change is therefore proposed to this.

5.13 There are other opportunities for development in other selected locations. We previously identified the centre of Langley, Chalvey and part of the Bath Road in Cippenham as having potential for regeneration. The opportunity for the centre of Langley appears to have gone and the Chalvey regeneration is under way.

5.14 We will continue to support the success of the district shopping centres and the ongoing transformation of the major employment areas.

- 5.15 As part of the work on selected key locations we will have to decide whether any greenfield/Green Belt sites on the edge of Slough should be developed to meet specific housing needs.
- 5.16 The Protecting the Suburbs Strategy was approved by this Committee at its meeting on 24th June. This showed why it was not practical, viable, sustainable or desirable to allow any of the family housing to be lost. There is still, however, scope for redevelopment on non garden land such as garage courts and other brownfield sites.
- 5.17 It is also important that we protect and enhance the open spaces, parks and other assets of community value within the residential areas.
- 5.18 At the same time we want to improve the range of facilities within the neighbourhoods so that people are able to “live locally” if they want to, without the need to travel. It is therefore proposed to reword this element of the Spatial Strategy to emphasise the need for the positive enhancement of the suburbs not just focusing on preserving them.
- 5.19 We are currently in the process of identifying what the capacity of Slough will be over the Local Plan period and are waiting for the results of the Centre of Slough Regeneration Framework site assessment work. This will be reported to a subsequent meeting of this Committee. It is, however, clear that there will be a shortfall of housing compared to currently identified need.
- 5.20 The “emerging” Spatial Strategy included the “promotion of the northern expansion of Slough in the form of a new garden suburb”. This remains the preferred option for meeting its unmet housing needs in the most sustainable way and balancing the housing market.
- 5.21 The Wider Growth Area Study is currently looking at where the best location for meeting Slough’s needs will be. Part 1 of the Study narrowed down the area of search to an area south of the M40 and north of the M4. It also identified the need for the new housing development to be in a form that was affordable to Slough residents. This means that at present the eastern, western and northern expansion of Slough all remain as options.
- 5.22 In order to not prompt the results of the Growth Study, which is not due to be completed until the end of the year, it is proposed that this element of the Spatial Strategy should be changed so that it just refers to the “expansion” of Slough. It would, however, still be made clear that the Northern Expansion remained this Council’s preferred option.
- 5.23 It should be noted that any expansion of Slough would have to take place within Buckinghamshire and so can only be advocated through the Slough Spatial Strategy and Local Plan. In order to help make this clear it is proposed that the Spatial Strategy should refer to the “cross boundary” expansion of

Slough.

5.24 Taking all of this into account it is proposed that the revised five key elements of the Spatial Strategy should be as follows:

- **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.

5.25 An explanation as to why we are proposing that this should form the overall approach to the preparation of the Spatial Strategy is set out below.

Evidence Base

5.26 One of the “Tests of Soundness” applied to Local Plans is that they have to be justified and based on “proportionate” evidence. We have been working compile an evidence base for some time using the Council’s strategies, documents produced by other organisations and studies that have been specifically commissioned to support the Local Plan.

5.27 The Covid19 pandemic has, however, had a dramatic effect upon many planning related matters which could affect the underlying assumptions in the Spatial Strategy.

5.28 It is not possible to predict what will happen in the short term or commission any new research at this stage until we know what the lasting implications of the shut down and changes in behaviour will be. This makes planning very difficult. It has to be recognised that the Local Plan runs until 2036 and so it has to take a long term view.

5.29 In considering how to decide what the best use of scare land in the Borough should be, the following factors have to be taken into account:

- Based upon the Government’s standard methodology, there is a need for 15,460 additional homes over the remaining 16 years of the plan period at an average of 966 a year.
- There is also a significant need for affordable housing and for a range of house types including family housing.

- We are unable to set a target for the number of jobs that are required to support the Slough economy but will continue to aim to provide an additional 15,000 jobs in order to meet the needs of the growing resident workforce. This should not be regarded as a maximum figure.
- There is a general demand for land for warehousing in the Slough area.
- There will be a significant reduction in the amount of retail floorspace in Slough town centre in recognition that it will no longer be a sub-regional shopping centre.
- Slough will become an increasingly important transport hub
- There continues to be a shortage of public open space in the Borough.

5.30 One of the other tests of soundness is that Local Plans have to be effective and the proposals be deliverable over the plan period. We have to recognise that we don't have all of the answers at this stage and cannot say with certainty that the proposals in the Spatial Strategy are fully viable and deliverable. We should, however, be in a position to demonstrate this by the time we submit the final document in 2022. Carrying out the public consultation in the meantime will help to identify what the issues are and what additional work will have to be done to help to support the plan.

Big Issues

5.31 Slough has huge opportunities and potential but faces some big issues, many of which are a result of its success. The Spatial Strategy needs to consider what the land use planning implications of the following issues may be.

- **Wealth/employment:** Slough is recognised as being an economic power house but it doesn't always benefit as much as it should from all of this economic activity. *How can we get more of the wealth generated in Slough to stay in Slough?*
- **Retail/leisure:** Slough has a failing shopping centre, no real night time economy and a lack of cultural facilities. This is one of the reasons why there isn't the expenditure in the Borough that there should be. The Council has invested heavily in leisure facilities. *How can we get the private sector to invest in new facilities?*
- **Housing:** There is a shortage of land for housing in Slough which, combined with a dysfunctional housing market means that not enough homes are being built by developers to meet overall needs or the specific needs of certain parts of the population. There is a viability problem which means that despite the demand for new homes, landowners/developers are not bringing sites forward even when there is the opportunity to do so. *How can we unlock the housing market?*

- **Environment/Health/Well being:** Slough has a poor image, underlying health problems, a shortage of green infrastructure and poor air quality. It also needs to address climate change. *How can we manage growth in a way which results in a net improvement for all of these things?*

Vision and Objectives

- 5.32 All plans need a “Vision” and a set of “Objectives” to guide them and provide a way of checking that they are actually delivering what is needed.
- 5.33 We agreed a vision with a set of 14 Objectives for the Local Plan when we produced the Issues and Options Consultation document in 2017. (See Appendix A) Whilst these should remain fairly constant, it is important that they are reviewed to take account of the Council’s latest strategies and changes in circumstances that may have occurred.
- 5.34 It should be noted that the Sustainability Appraisal has to have its own set of objectives. These are intended to be more generic and less policy based and so less likely to change. As a result it is proposed that, for the sake of consistency, we should use the same set of Objectives for Sustainability Appraisal that we have used so far in the plan making process. Further consultation will have to take place on the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal as part of the ongoing process.
- 5.35 The Vision for the Local Plan can be aspirational, setting out what we would like Slough to be like in the future. It needs to be focused upon planning matters but can cover related issues. It is important that the Local Plan vision reflects the vision set out in the Council’s other strategies.
- 5.36 This includes the latest version of the Council’s Five Year Plan (2020 – 2025) which states:
1. *Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful*
 2. *Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs.*
 3. *Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay.*
 4. *Our residents will live in good quality homes.*
 5. *Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide opportunities for our residents.*
- 5.37 Critically the 5 Year Plan affirms the commitment to the promotion of inclusive economic growth which ensures that the benefits from the regeneration and investment that takes place in Slough are shared by all residents.

5.38 The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy states that our consistent vision is to make Slough a place where *“People are proud to live, where diversity is celebrated and where residents can lead safe, fulfilling, prosperous and healthy lives.”*

5.39 The Inclusive Growth Strategies vision is that:

“Slough will be an economy which epitomises inclusiveness, diversity and resilience – where small businesses flourish, where large employers invest, and where residents have the opportunity to aspire and prosper. We will harness the value of our international connections and the potential of redevelopment and regeneration to present a confident and dynamic image to the world, where a rounded and sustainable approach to growth is intrinsic to our collective success.”

5.40 The number one priority in the emerging Centre of Slough Regeneration Framework is to “Deliver a 21st century town centre that is accessible to everybody and enhances health and well-being”.

5.41 The Town Centre Transport Vision (2019) aims to:

Make public transport the dominant mode of transport to and from the centre of Slough and the rest of the Borough.

Create an attractive environment in which people are put first in terms of movement and use of space for interaction, creating safe, healthy and vibrant spaces which encourage people to live, work and relax locally.

5.42 As explained above we do not expect the third runway to be built in the short to medium term and so the revised Vision needs to reflect this. Any proposal for the expansion of the airport can be dealt with in a review of the Local Plan.

5.43 Taking all of this into account it is suggested that the Local Plan Vision which was agreed for the Issues and Options consultation should be amended. The revised wording is highlighted in bold below so that it reads as follows:

*By 2036 Slough will have a high profile image which recognises its important role in the region as a prosperous, confident, **dynamic** attractive, metropolitan place where people **are proud** to work rest play and stay.*

The centre of Slough will be an attractive, vibrant hub providing high quality offices, retail and leisure, landmark buildings and cultural opportunities for our diverse communities.

Slough will be an “economic powerhouse” with a large skilled resident workforce and a reputation as an excellent place to do business which will encourage established and new companies to invest and grow in the Borough.

As a result of Crossrail, the Western rail link to Heathrow airport, Slough will be one of the best connected places. Accessibility within the town will have been improved through the development of convenient pedestrian, cycle and bus networks.

By encouraging investment, regeneration, innovation and high standards of design we will have created distinct environments with high quality public realm that create a sense of place.

Our proactive approach to meeting our housing need locally means Slough is a place where our residents feel a sense of belonging and are able to live in good quality and affordable homes.

*We are proud **to celebrate** our diversity and cohesion; we live in greener, safe and distinct neighbourhoods **where people have all that they need to be able to “live locally”***

*With lifelong access to excellent education and job opportunities, and the facilities and services they need **residents will be able to live happy, healthy and successful lives.***

Slough will have embraced new digital technologies for the benefit of the community to optimise the use of our spaces, places and transport network, and help our businesses and residents to help themselves to a better quality of life.

The promotion of inclusive economic growth will ensure that the benefits from the regeneration and investment that takes place in Slough are shared by all residents.

5.44 Member's comments on the revised Local Plan Vision would be welcomed.

Priorities and Principles

5.45 The work that was carried out at the Issues and Options stage demonstrated that, mainly as a result of a shortage of land in Slough, not all of the needs identified above can be met in the plan area. As a result the Spatial Strategy has to resolve the competition for the use of the scarce amount of land that we have in Slough. At the same time, not everything will be deliverable due to economic and environmental constraints.

5.46 National planning policy puts great emphasis upon meeting needs. The presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is at the heart of the NPPF, specifically states “strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for *housing* and other uses .. “

5.47 One of the “tests of soundness” applied to Local Plans is whether they have

been positively prepared and provide a strategy which, as a minimum, meets the area's objectively assessed needs. Local Plans are mainly tested upon whether they are meeting housing numbers.

- 5.48 We have a real need for a variety of housing which is affordable and is the right size and tenure. Much of this need cannot be met elsewhere. We also want Slough to be a place where people will want to “*work, rest, play and stay*”. As a result significant priority has to be given to meeting housing needs in the Spatial Strategy. If these needs cannot be met within the Plan area the priority should be to meet them as close as possible to where they arise.
- 5.49 The NPPF requires Local Plans to make sufficient provision for employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development.
- 5.50 A significant amount of the new housing in the Borough is coming from commercial sites either in the form of the change of use of offices to residential or through housing development upon former industrial land. One of the options in the Issues and Options consultation was to redevelop more Existing Business Areas for housing. This was one of the options that was rejected in developing the “emerging” Spatial Strategy.
- 5.51 It was decided not to allow any further loss of employment land because this would conflict with other Objectives such as the need to create 15,000 new jobs, ensure that Slough's economy creates wealth, has a diverse economic base and supports business start-ups. It is proposed that the Spatial Strategy should continue with this approach and seek to promote new inclusive economic growth which benefits the town as a whole.
- 5.52 The Economic Needs Assessment identified the need for up to 160 hectares of land for warehousing. This was not considered to be a priority on the basis that such distribution uses can be located over a wide geographical area and did not need to be in Slough. The Council's support for development in association with the proposed third runway at Heathrow was on the basis that this was needed to support the expansion of the airport.
- 5.53 It is anticipated that there will be a significant reduction in the amount of retail floorspace in the Borough mainly in the town centre. Priority will be given to supporting existing centres of all sizes which means that major shopping or commercial leisure facilities will not be allowed in out of centre locations.
- 5.54 There is a shortage of open space in Slough and so top priority will be given to the protection and enhancement of this. In terms of greenery, Slough has a lower level of tree coverage compared to other comparable areas.
- 5.55 There is a significant level of congestion in Slough, particularly at peak times. In dealing with conflicts between the needs of the private car and the needs of other uses it is proposed that priority should be given to walking, cycling and

people should be put first in terms of the use of public space.

Guiding Principles

- 5.56 Taking account of all of the above we have developed some guiding principles to help determine what the Spatial Strategy should and what strategic policies will be needed to deliver it in the most sustainable way.
- 5.57 The first is to make sure that development is located in the most accessible locations possible in order to reduce the need to travel and encourage more sustainable modes of travel. This will also reduce our carbon foot print and help to reduce the impact upon the environment and air quality.
- 5.58 We have carried out work to identify the relative accessibility of different parts of the Borough taking into account both rail and bus services. The results of the PTAL (public transport accessibility) model for Slough illustrates how the centre of Slough is by far the most accessible location in Slough and how many of the outlying residential areas and the Poyle Trading Estate have very poor accessibility by public transport. It should also be remembered that the centre of Slough contains a lot of the town's major facilities and so people living in the centre can walk to their destination. This makes it even more sustainable location for development.
- 5.59 The centre of Slough is already an important transport hub and so it is important that we take advantage of this and make it even more attractive.
- 5.60 One of the other core principles is to make the most effective use of land by using that which has been previously developed. The centre of Slough contains a lot of these brownfield sites which should be capable of being regenerated without a significant environmental impact. The centre of Slough is also the area with the most demand for new development and so should be the area most likely to be able to deliver this.
- 5.61 All of these factors suggest that the Spatial Strategy should be based upon the fact that the centre of Slough is the most suitable location for major development.
- 5.62 It is recognised that there is also scope for new development elsewhere in the Borough. Given the overall scale of growth in the town, this needs to be targeted in locations which will produce the most benefits.
- 5.63 We can only have sustainable development if, in addition to meeting our economic and social objectives, we are able to protect and enhance the natural and built environment. It should be noted that planning to meet as many of our needs as we can in Slough makes a significant contribution to reducing the overall environmental footprint.

5.64 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.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The Spatial Strategy is an important part of the Local Plan which seeks to determine how much development goes where. This report sets out the proposed overall approach to producing the Spatial Strategy for Slough. Taking this into account, it recommends that there should be five key elements of the Spatial Strategy which would be:

- ***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.

6.2 A report will be brought to the next meeting of this Committee which will set out in detail what is proposed for each of these elements of the Spatial Strategy.

7 Background Papers

7.1 Review of the Local Plan for Slough – Issues and Options Consultation Document 2017

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Local Plan Vision and Objectives in the Issues and Options Consultation Document 2017.