



CABINET – 17 DECEMBER 2019

**RESPONSE TO CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL'S DRAFT
CHARNWOOD LOCAL PLAN (2019-36) PREFERRED OPTION
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 Charnwood Borough Council relating to its 'Draft Charnwood Local Plan (2019-36) Preferred Option'.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that the comments set out in paragraphs 18 to 80 of this report and the detailed consultation response appended be approved as the County Council's response to Charnwood Borough Council's 'Draft Charnwood Local Plan (2019-36) Preferred Option'.

Reasons for Recommendation

3. To provide the County Council's response to Charnwood Borough Council. 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. Following consideration by the Cabinet on 17 December 2019, the response of the County Council will be submitted to Charnwood Borough Council.

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 Charnwood Borough Council on 5 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 Charnwood divisions.

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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 north and north west parts of Leicestershire, which includes Charnwood Borough, the foci for growth set out in SGP are:
 - The Leicestershire International Gateway;
 - Managed growth for Loughborough and Coalville;
 - The northern end of the A46 Priority Growth Corridor.
15. The essential infrastructure to support the delivery of growth shown on the SGP strategy diagram for the north and north west parts of Leicestershire are the M1 smart motorway, A46 Expressway (route to be defined), M42/A42 Expressway, rail improvements and HS2. Also, the new Junction 20a on the M1 will have a positive impact on the delivery of growth in the north and north west parts of Leicestershire.
16. This is the third 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 preferred option for the draft Charnwood Local Plan 2019 to 2036 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 Preferred Option Consultation

Overarching and general comments

18. Charnwood Borough Council is currently undertaking consultation on its Draft Charnwood Local Plan 2019 to 2036; this is an informal consultation period on preferred options to inform its thinking on its emerging plan and will be followed in due course by formal consultation on its Pre-Submission Draft Local Plan (Regulation 19).
19. The County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the emerging Local Plan, which seeks to align with the new SGP for Leicester and Leicestershire and new evidence of the need for homes and jobs. Once progressed through to adoption the new local plan will replace the current Charnwood Core Strategy which was adopted in November 2015 and provides a development strategy for the Charnwood Borough area to 2028. Charnwood Borough Council anticipate the publication of the Pre-Submission Draft Plan and Examination in Public of the plan in 2020.
20. Forty-three questions are posed in the consultation document. Officers from key service areas have appraised the document from their key service area perspectives and key comments are set out in this report with detailed comments included in the appendix.

Vision, Development Strategy, Housing and Employment

21. With regard to the vision 'environment' needs to be placed higher, at the forefront of the vision. There is an increasing recognition that unless environmental issues (climate change, biodiversity loss, resource scarcity) are addressed there will not be a strong economy or much in the way of a quality of life. As such, Charnwood Borough is advised to move 'environment' to the fore.
22. The County Council recognises that a significant proportion of the housing need for the Borough to 2036 is already planned for; this includes three Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs):
 - North East of Leicester at Thurmaston SUE;
 - West of Loughborough SUE; and
 - North of Birstall SUE.
23. These SUEs will continue to deliver houses after 2028 into the new local plan period, and in the case of the North East of Leicester at Thurmaston SUE (planning permission for 4,500 homes) beyond 2036 as well.
24. Charnwood BC proposes to save the policies from the Core Strategy regarding the North East of Leicester at Thurmaston SUE and west of Loughborough SUE, and the draft Local Plan contains updated policies for the north of Birstall

(confirming as a SUE allocation), and the Watermead Regeneration Corridor (confirming as an allocation as a regeneration corridor to support the regeneration of Thurmaston, help meet the needs for jobs and maximise the potential of the Country Park).

25. The confirmation and identification of strategic sites as SUEs to deliver a significant proportion of the Borough's planned growth is welcomed as this will help secure the infrastructure investment required to deliver new homes and jobs.
26. A commitment to comprehensive masterplanning is sought within the draft Local Plan to aid the co-ordination and delivery of strategic sites and specific smaller sites; particularly where there is likely to be a cumulative impact from several related sites.
27. There are a further 70 smaller housing allocations identified in the draft Local Plan in the Leicester Urban Area, the Loughborough Urban Area, Shepshed Urban Area, service centres and other settlements.
28. Outside of the proposed SUEs the scattered and relatively small-scale nature of the development locations around the Borough means that it will be especially important for the Local Plan to have strong policies around the identification of cumulative impacts and the securing of mitigation to offset those impacts to achieve the stated vision and objectives.
29. Charnwood Borough Council's preferred strategy, based on evidence (including the use of the new national standard methodology for calculating housing need) is to plan for a low growth scenario with a significant element of flexibility to take account of changing circumstances. This translates into Charnwood Borough needing to provide a further 5,930 homes to meet needs for the longer plan period once commitments are taken into account, and a further 1,300 additional homes intended to provide sufficient flexibility to maintain a supply of housing land.
30. The County Council supports an evidence-based approach to arriving at the preferred scale of housing provision, but expresses caution and concern this may be too low for the following three reasons:
 - Firstly, the Local Plan provision figure ideally needs to incorporate a buffer of 20% to enable sufficient flexibility, and to provide Charnwood Borough with the ability to maintain a five-year land supply of deliverable sites. It appears that this is not the case.
 - Secondly, partners are now in a position where the scale of unmet housing need for Leicester City is becoming clearer and although the redistribution of this unmet need is likely to be zero towards Charnwood Borough due to the strategy of the SGP, it is suggested that sufficient scope needs to be incorporated in emerging plan making to increase provision if informed through the Statement of Common Ground that this should be the case.

- Thirdly, a low growth option does not appear to chime well with the Government's national ambition to achieve the delivery of 300,000 new homes each year, although it is noted that the low growth option would still require a step change in housing delivery in Charnwood Borough compared to its current Core Strategy requirement (820 homes a year).
31. As such it is considered that the proposed further housing provision figure of 7,252 homes should be increased or regarded as a minimum and that further consideration is given to increasing the figure on the finalisation of the Statement of Common Ground.
 32. With regard to employment land the County Council strongly supports the development and further expansion of the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park and notes the continued support for this in the draft Local Plan, recognising the scope to be one of the largest science parks in the UK with a diverse range of businesses within the knowledge-based and high technology manufacturing sectors.
 33. Reference is made to the wider needs for larger strategic distribution units in Leicestershire and the current study being undertaken at a Housing Market Area level to ensure a combined approach is taken to address the needs of this sector. The County Council supports this approach and understands the results will inform the Pre-Submission Draft Plan.
 34. Charnwood Borough Council has reviewed existing employment commitments and considers these continue to meet its needs and deliver its preferred strategy for economic growth. These commitments include employment provision as part of the SUEs at the North East of Leicester, West of Loughborough and North of Birstall as well as part of the Watermead Regeneration Corridor.
 35. It is considered that this approach, together with the continued focus of employment uses in Loughborough and Leicester, is appropriate; however, should further housing provision be made this should be balanced with the further identification of employment land to provide the opportunity for the co-location of jobs and homes.
 36. It is noted that the importance of the service sector is referred to in the draft Local Plan, but little reference is made to Loughborough University and Loughborough College as important employers in the area. It is understood that the inclusion of figures quantifying the number of employees would illustrate the contribution made from these employers.
 37. With regard to town centres it is considered that town centre leakage figures and a list of key tourism assets need to be included to help understand how the local town centres currently function and the assets they contain.

38. Cultural institutions such as the Charnwood Museum and Loughborough Library, which is the largest in the County, play a significant role in supporting Loughborough town centre and its regeneration, and in supporting the priorities around protecting and enhancing heritage assets and encouraging greater tourism at attractions such as the Great Central Railway, Carillion and Stoneywell.
39. Draft Policy LP36 (North of Birstall Sustainable Urban Extension), refers to the Leicestershire Minerals Development Framework but this has now been replaced by the Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan up to 2031 which was formally adopted on the 25th September 2019. Regard should be given to the Mineral and Waste Safeguarding Charnwood Borough Document S2/2015 which forms part of the plan and lists the areas of the borough which are safeguarded for mineral purposes. Several of the allocations in the Draft Charnwood Local Plan lie in sand and gravel safeguarding areas and this should be considered.
40. Site allocation HS 43 is adjacent to two approved waste management sites; Newhurst Quarry where a large-scale energy recovery facility is being developed, and the nearby former roof tiles factory where a waste transfer station currently operates from Ingleberry Road. These are safeguarded in the Mineral and Waste Safeguarding Charnwood Borough Document S2/2015 which forms part of the recently adopted Leicestershire Minerals and Waste Local Plan.
41. Specific comments have been provided on the proposed allocations from a Highways Development Management perspective and these are included in the appendix.

Environment and Climate Change

42. With regard to key challenges, there is not just the challenge from the impacts of climate change there is also the challenge of taking the actions needed to avoid the worst effects of climate change (i.e., by reducing emissions, increasing carbon sequestration etc) by reducing energy demand, changing to renewable forms of energy, low / zero carbon transport / mobility solutions, increasing energy efficiency etc. Addressing this challenge will reduce the need to put time, money and effort into dealing with the impacts of climate change. Taking action on this should also create new economic and employment opportunities for the area. The Plan should strive to reference the full challenge of climate change.
43. It is requested that a further bullet point to draft Policy LP2 on high quality design is added as follows:
 - Create places that work for both people and wildlife.
44. It is considered that draft Policy LP25 on Open Spaces, Sport and Recreation does not sufficiently take into account wider health issues. Open space in itself will not support people's health and wellbeing. The quality of that open space and the available facilities is also an important factor as is the environment

within which it is set especially in terms of air quality. As such, suggested policy wording is proposed to reflect this.

45. The County Council supports the principle that developments should contribute towards the quality of the area over the lifetime of the development, and would expect the Local Plan to set out how this is to be achieved in terms of the use of any non-standard materials or items proposed to be used within the public highway (e.g. through commuted sums).
46. Reference needs to be included to reducing impacts for areas of habitat that are vulnerable to climate change as per the Natural England Climate Change Vulnerability Mapping. Ensuring habitats which are vulnerable are in the best condition, to allow resilience to the negative impacts of climate change.
47. The County Council is proactive in supporting sustainable modes of travel. In October 2018, the County Council adopted its new Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy (PTPS) and is currently undertaking service reviews to consider affordable solutions to meet communities' needs. In the context of the PTPS, it should be noted that the County Highway Authority is increasingly looking to put the onus on site promoters to come forward with passenger transport proposals appropriate to the scale and nature of their development as opposed to seeking financial payments through S106 agreements. It would be useful if the supporting text to the policy could reflect this.
48. Furthermore, the PTPS recognises the increasing financial challenges of supporting non-commercial, traditional bus services and potentially requires alternative solutions such as demand responsive transport or community initiatives to be explored. As such, the County Highway Authority would look to work with the Borough Council through the planning process to ensure that new development is appropriately supported by passenger transport services.
49. The commitment to pursuing walking and cycling initiatives in conjunction with the Local Plan is welcomed. With regard to the preparation of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, it is important that these are developed around appropriate geographical areas, in conjunction with relevant wider strategies in planning/development, and in partnership with the County Highway Authority and other bodies (e.g. Leicester City Council) where applicable.

Infrastructure and delivery

50. The Vision refers to "...excellent connections by bus...". This, along with any other references to bus services (or similar) throughout the document (e.g. within draft policy LP33), should be widened out to refer more generally to "passenger transport" to reflect the County Council's Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy (PTPS). The distinction is important given that the PTPS recognises the increasing financial challenges of supporting non-commercial, traditional bus services and the need for alternative solutions such as demand responsive transport or community initiatives.

51. The initial transport evidence undertaken by Charnwood Borough Council helpfully highlighted the magnitude of transport impacts of differing growth options, both in terms of quantum and spatial focus. The evidence suggests that, in overall terms, the levels of housing growth proposed in the draft local plan should be capable of being accommodated on the transport system over the plan period, subject to appropriate mitigation.
52. In comparison to the existing core strategy, the proposed distribution of new homes in the draft local plan contains a greater number of relatively smaller sites, more widely spatially distributed. This being the case, it will be important for the local plan to have strong policies around the identification of cumulative impacts and the securing of mitigation to offset those impacts to achieve the stated vision and objectives.
53. With regard to specific locations, the identification of Shepshed as forming part of the Strategic Growth Plan's "Leicestershire International Gateway" suggests that it will be necessary to revisit transport connectivity assumptions for this area, for example in respect of where people may choose to work in future. It may be necessary to consider joint work with North West Leicestershire District Council to develop supporting transport evidence in relation to this.
54. Notwithstanding growth being relatively more scattered than the existing core strategy, Charnwood Borough Council's transport evidence suggests that the draft Local Plan proposals are nonetheless likely to place considerable additional pressure on Loughborough's transport system, which will require a coordinated strategy for mitigation.
55. Equally, the proposed concentration of further growth around the north and west edges of the Leicester Urban Area, when combined with growth within the City and Blaby District, means that a coordinated strategy will similarly be needed to develop and underpin delivery of transport mitigation measures in this area.
56. Additionally, the proposed further growth in settlements in and around the Soar Valley is likely to put pressure on a highway network which is subject to significant resilience issues (i.e. regular flooding, limited cross-river connectivity). As above, this will need to be considered as part of strategies for mitigation in this area.
57. Comprehensive masterplanning is sought to aid the delivery of specific sites. For example, within this context of comprehensive masterplanning, the proposal for two separate, relatively small-scale housing sites through allocation HS5 (Land at Gynsill Lane and Anstey Lane, Glenfield) is not especially helpful in transport terms, particularly in the context of potential adjoining growth opportunities in Leicester City and Blaby District. The County Council would prefer to see coordinated, joint working between the three authorities to deliver a single, comprehensively master planned development in this area.

58. Reference to rail needs to be included in the Draft Local Plan, particularly given the importance of Loughborough Railway Station and the key supporting role to the quarrying industry within the borough.
59. Noting the potential interactions of growth proposed through the draft Local Plan with neighbouring Districts (including Leicester City, Blaby and North West Leicestershire) and the potential resulting cumulative impacts within and without the Borough, text could be added to policy LP34 on the Local and Strategic Road Network to reflect this and provide a basis for cross-boundary contributions and mitigation.
60. The Local Plan should provide a robust policy framework for ensuring that the cumulative impacts of growth (both within and without the Borough) are properly understood, the approach to mitigation is clearly identified and the costs and approach to funding for supporting infrastructure and mitigation is also clear. This may include the need for comprehensive masterplanning across sites, the development of supporting strategies and the development of an agreed approach to the funding and cash-flowing of mitigation/supporting infrastructure.
61. The Local Plan should also have due regard to the potential longer-term strategic growth and infrastructure requirements (including transport) within the “south east Charnwood” area (i.e. Syston, East Goscote etc.) as part of the Strategic Growth Plan’s “A46 Priority Growth Corridor”.
62. There is little mention of Park and Ride, which is referred to in relation to the North of Birstall SUE but not in regard to ‘Sustainability’ or ‘Parking’.
63. The support for the provision of superfast broadband networks for all homes and businesses is a welcome inclusion.
64. As part of this support, it is advised that Charnwood Borough Council considers creating incentives for future investment in digital infrastructure within the Local Plan. This could include outlining how planning policies will facilitate the rollout of both fixed full fibre and mobile infrastructure.
65. The Children and Family Services Department at the County Council is liaising with Charnwood Borough Council on the requirements for education arising from the draft Local Plan.
66. The County Council’s new Growth Unit will be able to assist with accelerating the delivery of strategic sites.

Comments from Strategic Property Services at the County Council

67. The comments of the Strategic Property Services, Corporate Resources Department in relation to Leicestershire County Council’s role as a Landowner with property interests within Charnwood Borough follow below.

Vision and Objectives

68. The vision and objectives are generally welcomed and show strong links with the Strategic Growth Plan and the County Council's Strategic Plan 2018 – 22. However, the Development Strategy at Paragraph 1 could be expanded by the following addition, namely, *“to maintain the role of Service Centres as vibrant sustainable communities by the allocation of appropriate levels of new development”*.

Development Strategy

69. The approach of using the standard methodology as a baseline assessment is seen as sound and complies with the requirements of the NPPF. However, it is recognised that there will be substantial unmet needs within Leicester City which will need to be accommodated within neighbouring authorities; the distribution of which will be set out in a Statement of Common Ground (SOCG) to be agreed by all authorities across the HMA. It is therefore essential that the plan is flexible enough to take account of the both the unmet needs of the City and potential economic growth. It is therefore considered that the proposed allocation of 7252 homes be regarded as a minimum and that further consideration be given to increasing this allocation on the finalisation of the MoU.
70. In relation to employment needs the strategy needs to address any potential areas of market failure particularly in relation to providing the ability for fledgling business to be established and thrive providing a ladder for expansion and business development.
71. The Settlement Hierarchy is seen as sound and the distribution of new homes across the hierarchy as logical as it concentrates on larger urban sites that have the ability to deliver the infrastructure required to support the new communities. In addition, the allocation of housing to Service Centres is seen as essential to maintaining the sustainability of these communities. However, the allocation of specific sites removes the flexibility essential to good plan making by reducing the ability to bring forward sites on an opportunity basis to meet any shortfalls in supply. Further, the reliance on small sites to deliver 10% of the allocation is questioned as is their ability to deliver the infrastructure required to mitigate their impact on local services.
72. The aspiration that development is of good design meets that of the Strategic Plan and Strategic Growth Plan and is therefore welcomed.

Housing

73. To reiterate, with the exception of the three sustainable urban extensions (sites HS1 – HS3) the allocation of specific sites reduces the opportunity for other sites in sustainable locations to be brought forward to meet shortfalls in 5-year supply. In relation to its own land interests within Charnwood Borough the County Council would seek to promote the following housing site as a potential alternative to that proposed in Policy LP3:-

- Land at Farley Way, Quorn – The Council owns 8 acres of land at Farley Way, Quorn situated to the west of the A6 By-pass adjoining existing development. Whilst, the land had previously been considered as being located within a flood risk area, exhaustive survey and technical appraisals have been undertaken in consultation with the Environment Agency which clearly demonstrate that the current flood map is flawed and that the development of the site is not constrained. It is therefore considered that the site is capable of contributing at least 48 new homes towards the housing needs of the village in a sustainable location close to all existing services and within what would be the logical limits of development. By comparison the site at Loughborough Road, Quorn is situated in a less sustainable location more remote from the village centre and extends into the area of separation between Quorn and Loughborough. Further, the land at Farley Way is both available, with a willing landowner, and deliverable. Additional information addressing the perceived flood zoning constraints has already been presented to the Local Planning Authority to provide confidence that the site provides a deliverable development option.

Affordable Housing

74. The delivery of affordable housing accords with the Council's strategic objectives and is therefore supported. The level of affordable housing proposed at 30%, as a maximum, reflects the overall needs of the Borough, however, the proposal that small sites be exempt from contributing towards the achievement of the overall need may act to constrain the delivery of required numbers. Recognition that the proportion of affordable housing can be reduced in circumstances where it can be demonstrated that the viability of a site cannot support the full 30% of affordable housing is seen as sound.
75. Policy LP5 is seen as maintaining the vitality of smaller settlements and therefore welcomed.

Employment and Regeneration

76. The development and further expansion of the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park is strongly supported.
77. In common with the allocation of housing sites the policy constrains the potential of bringing forward sites on an opportunity basis in locations which meets the criteria set out in the remainder of Policy LP12. For example, the County Council owns a 2.5 acre site at Barrow Road, Quorn with the ability to deliver circa 45,000 square feet of employment space within easy reach of the village in a location that provides excellent access to the major road network at a scale that would be attractive to SMEs and capable of meeting the needs of the growing community. Further, the land, which is within flood zone 1, is both available and deliverable.

78. In addition, by taking a more flexible approach the opportunity exists to make up any shortfall in land supply caused by any existing employment sites being redeveloped for alternative uses.
79. Policy PL16 is supported as it provides the opportunity to stimulate economic growth through the diversification of rural farming businesses and the economic use of underutilised assets.

Environment

80. Policies LP19 – LP28 are seen as sound and meeting the requirements of the NPPF in relation to the range of issues covered and seeks to protect and enhance the important landscape, geological and other natural features of the Borough whilst promoting its leisure and economic potential.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

81. 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 full 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 Response to Charnwood Borough Council's *Draft Charnwood Local Plan (2019-36) Preferred Option* Consultation

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