

# Statement of Community Involvement

## Breckland District Council – Local Plan Review Overview and Scrutiny Commission hearing 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021

### Parishes Response

Contributors: Representatives of Mattishall, Yaxham, Rocklands, Swanton Morley, Brettenham, Kilverstone and Saham Toney Parish Councils in addition to Neighbourhood Planning Groups.

#### Key Points:

At the Council's Cabinet meeting in September 2021, the decision was made that – a single partial review of Policy INF03 was to run in parallel with a substantive review of the whole Plan.

The proposed timetable shows an end date for the substantive review of 2027. Whilst the current adopted Local Plan has a life span of 20 years unless it is reviewed within 5 years its effectiveness will be substantially reduced beyond 2024. With this proposed timetable there will be a period of 3 years with an out-of-date Local Plan (2024 – 2027).

The BDC stated cost of producing the substantive review is £1.4 million of which over £562k is currently unallocated. This figure may well change if additional resource or the timeframe changes.

Local Plan policy INF03 was required by the Planning Inspector to be reviewed by November 2022.

A decision was made by Cabinet in June 2020 to proceed with a full review of the Plan but not the partial review required to comply with INF03. The full review was to be achieved by adoption in 2024 i.e. in line with the requirement to be completed by the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the original adoption and with an appropriate timescale to adoption in 2024.

The Cabinet report (Sept 2021) sets out the changed circumstances and reasons for this review not being achievable in the original timescale.

The report states (para 3.7) that the risk of key elements of the Plan being deemed “out-of-date” because Breckland District Council (BDC); has not completed its INF03 review, represents a significant reputational risk to the Council however, the consequences of BDC's inaction will be borne entirely by the Parishes.

It should be noted that the Cabinet report does not give similar emphasis to the risk of not having completed the substantive Review by November 2024.

The ability of BDC to maintain an up-to-date Local Plan in order to control new housing development is of fundamental importance. Notwithstanding, there are other elements of the Local Plan that need urgently revising:

1. In the adopted Local Plan, (NPPF para. 128, Jul 21) BDC is to “produce a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on design guides or codes to reflect local character and design preferences.” This has not been done some 2 years after adoption without any reasonable explanation.
2. There are other matters in the Local Plan that need supplementary policy detail. BDC needs to address the current woefully inadequate developer contribution requirement for the maintenance of open space. The Council should undertake an urgent comparative study with other Districts and bring Breckland in line with more progressive authorities. The decision not to implement a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) deprives Breckland and its parishes of much needed funding to mitigate the severe impact that new developments have on our district.
3. The Cabinet report (para. 6.20) states that there will be no external Parish or Town council consultation. This is unacceptable; Neighbourhood Plans are part of the statutory development plan. So far, BDC has not consulted with affected parishes and not sought their views, nor given any advice or assistance as they are required to do. Consequently, the decision of BDC not to have an up-to-date plan between 2024 and 2027 has a fundamental impact on the status of the district’s Neighbourhood Plans. The authors of this paper together with other parishes did not spend considerable time and resources preparing Neighbourhood Plans for them to be rendered out of date because of inappropriate planning by BDC.

The Cabinet report states that “the proposed end date of 2027 allows for flexibility to accommodate changes that may result from planning reforms”. Unless BDC know more about the Government’s thinking than is in the public domain, there is no suggestion that national planning reforms will lengthen the plan making/review process- rather the opposite. The authors do not consider that Cabinet’s proposed end date gives flexibility, on the contra it provides significant and unacceptable risk.

It is acknowledged that completing the substantive review by 2024 will necessitate the deployment of additional staff (whether directly employed; employed via a Capita contract; or procured elsewhere) however, this is a cost that BDC must meet.

Clearly, the necessary resources to complete the review need to be made available. The Cabinet report suggests that BDC has significantly under resourced the necessary staffing capacity need to deliver the review.

## Summary

In conclusion, BDC currently has an adopted Local Plan and can demonstrate a five-year housing land supply - this is a positive position. A substantive review of an adopted plan should not take 6 years to complete. Our request is that BDC undertake a thorough reassessment of the review timetable, potentially independently of Capita. The Local Government Association and PAS (Planning Advisory Service) will be able to assist.

In the light of these considerable concerns, it is requested that Cabinet review and set a realistic and shorter timetable.

We must have reassurance that there will be continuity of an up-to-date Local Plan to enable Breckland Council to proactively manage the growth of the district and to protect our district from speculative and uncontrolled development.

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<sup>i</sup> Note: Due to the timespan involving the publication of BDC Cabinet's decision; Parish Councils named within this paper have not had the opportunity to endorse this document at full council meetings.