

Report of the Head of Strategic Planning Policy.

UK Planning Reform and Requirement for a Local Plan Scoping Consultation

Summary

1. This report provides an overview of current UK planning reforms and explains the requirement for undertaking a Local Plan scoping consultation as an early stage in the preparation of a new Local Plan. It sets out the implications of national policy changes, including expectations for plan-making timeliness, evidence gathering, engagement and digitalisation, and outlines how the Council will respond through initiating a Local Plan review and as a first step, a structured scoping consultation.
2. Following the decision by Executive in considering these matters and the decision to initiate a Local Plan review, this report seeks to discuss the approach to scope the new Local Plan, ensuring compliance with national policy, strengthening the evidence base, and enabling early engagement with stakeholders and communities.

Recommendations

3. The Committee is asked to:
 - a. Endorse the proposed approach to undertaking a Local Plan scoping consultation as the first formal stage in the preparation of the new Local Plan.

Reason: To ensure early engagement on key issues, align with national planning reform expectations, and establish a robust and proportionate evidence base.

- b. Note the implications of UK planning reform for plan-making, including requirements for speed, soundness, community involvement, and digital accessibility.

Reason: To ensure Members understand the evolving national policy context and its impact on the Council's statutory planning responsibilities.

4. Note that the outcomes of the scoping consultation will inform the preparation of subsequent stages of the Local Plan.

Reason: To ensure a transparent and evidence-led progression of the Local Plan process.

Background

5. The planning system in England is currently undergoing a significant programme of reform intended to modernise plan-making, increase certainty, and accelerate the delivery of housing and infrastructure. These reforms have been advanced through updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA), and evolving national guidance¹, alongside the Government's stated ambition to create a more streamlined, rules-based system supported by digital planning. Most recently The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026² have been released setting out in detail the process for local policy making.
6. A central element of reform is the renewed emphasis on the primacy of an up-to-date Local Plan. National policy reinforces that decisions should be made in accordance with an adopted plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Authorities without an up-to-date plan are at greater risk of speculative development and reduced control over the location and form of growth. As such, Government expectations are that all authorities should prepare and maintain a current Local Plan within a clear and accelerated timetable.
7. Recent reforms and policy changes introduce a number of key requirements and expectations for plan-making:

¹ [New local plan-making system roadmap - GOV.UK](#)

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2026/186/contents/made>

- **Timeliness and plan preparation:** Local Plans are expected to be prepared more quickly, with a typical target timeframe of approximately 30 months from commencement to adoption with three gateways to pass through prior to examination (see Annex A). Passing through Gateway 1 triggers the start of the 30-month plan-making timetable. To achieve these timescales it requires early clarity of scope, evidence needs and programme management.
 - **Streamlined evidence base:** There is a move toward proportionate, standardised and more transparent evidence, reducing unnecessary complexity while ensuring plans remain robust and sound at examination.
 - **Mandatory and strengthened engagement:** Early, front-loaded engagement is encouraged to identify issues, test assumptions and improve plan quality before formal publication stages.
 - **Digitalisation of the planning system:** Plans and consultations are expected to be accessible, interactive and supported by digital platforms to broaden engagement and improve usability.
 - **Focus on delivery:** Greater emphasis is placed on ensuring that plans are deliverable, including alignment with infrastructure providers, viability considerations, and clear implementation strategies.
8. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act also introduces a broader framework for plan-making reform, including the potential for a more standardised Local Plan structure, National Development Management Policies (NDMPs), and changes to the Duty to Cooperate. While transitional arrangements continue to evolve, authorities are expected to align emerging plan preparation with the direction of national reform.
9. Further, the introduction of Spatial Development Strategies prepared by Combined Authorities, is proposed to strengthen cross-boundary planning and strategic coordination. CYC officers will need to work closely with the York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority to ensure there is synergy between the regional and local plan-led approaches.

National Planning Policy Framework (Consultation Draft, December 2025)

10. The Government has recently consulted on a comprehensive revision to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), representing a significant overhaul of national planning policy. The proposals form part of a broader programme of planning reform aimed at increasing

certainty, accelerating plan-making, and supporting housing and economic growth.

11. A key structural change is the introduction of a clearer distinction between plan-making policies and national decision-making policies, with the latter intended to provide a comprehensive and consistent basis for development management across England. The revised Framework seeks to make policy more rules-based and accessible, introducing greater certainty for applicants and decision-makers and reducing the need for duplication within Local Plans.
12. The consultation reinforces the primacy of the plan-led system, with strong expectations that authorities produce up-to-date Local Plans within a significantly reduced timeframe, supported by proportionate evidence and early engagement.
13. A central theme of the reforms is a stronger focus on housing delivery and growth. This includes a revised presumption in favour of development in suitable locations, a strengthened brownfield-first approach, and significant emphasis on urban densification, including minimum density expectations in well-connected areas such as those around transport nodes. The Framework also seeks to support a wider mix of housing, including affordable, accessible and specialist provision, alongside measures to support small and medium-sized sites and improve build-out rates.
14. The draft Framework proposes important changes to the spatial distribution of development, supporting growth within settlements while adopting a more selective approach in the countryside. It also introduces reforms to Green Belt policy, including a qualitative assessment to identify lower-quality “grey belt” land and greater flexibility to release land in sustainable locations, subject to safeguards.
15. Further changes strengthen policy on climate change, energy and environmental protection, including a greater emphasis on mitigation and adaptation, support for renewable and low-carbon energy infrastructure, and enhanced biodiversity and nature recovery measures.
16. The new NPPF is expected for release in Summer 2026. Based upon the consultation version we can expect a move towards a more standardised, delivery-focused system, with earlier and more clearly defined plan-making stages and more clearly defined policies for decision-taking.

Local Plan Scoping Consultation

17. The Council must now prepare a Local Plan review that sets out a spatial strategy, allocates land for development, and establishes policies to guide decision-making aligned to the new planning system. Having an up-to-date plan is critical to ensure our local policy aligns to updated national guidance to ensure our decision-taking is robust. It will also support demonstrating a five-year housing land supply and our sustainable development objectives.
18. A scoping consultation represents an important early and statutory stage in the reformed Local Plan process. It sits ahead of the first formal Gateway and the triggering of the 30-month plan preparation timescale. It is used to establish the baseline framework for plan preparation and the plan's strategic vision. Its primary purpose is to:
 - Identify and prioritise the key spatial, environmental, social and economic issues facing the authority area, including the plan vision
 - Gather baseline data and intelligence from stakeholders, infrastructure providers and the community
 - Establish the scope and proportionate level of evidence required to underpin the plan
 - Highlight spatial options, strategic choices and potential policy themes for further testing
 - Inform the project plan, including risks, dependencies and alignment with national reform requirements
19. Undertaking a scoping consultation at an early stage helps to establish the direction local policy should take and consequently helps to mitigate risks later in the plan-making process, particularly at examination. It also supports compliance with legal and procedural requirements, including engagement expectations and alignment with cross-boundary matters.
20. In this context, progressing a structured scoping consultation provides the Council with an opportunity to respond proactively to national planning reform, establish a clear and deliverable Local Plan programme, and ensure that subsequent stages of plan preparation are informed by a robust and transparent evidence base.
21. In determining the structure of the consultation, officers have sought to identify:

- What is currently happening, including the approach in the adopted Local Plan
 - What is new and influences our approach
 - The key challenge the Local Plan will need to consider
 - Questions to draw out views.
22. Critically, the key questions are phrased to identify whether we have identified the right evidence and key challenges to consider in the new Local Plan.
23. Officers have also identified the following key areas to explore as part of the scoping consultation:
- Housing and specialist accommodation needs
 - Economy, jobs and investment
 - Education and skills
 - Retail, tourism and culture
 - Design
 - Heritage
 - Environment, climate and Green Infrastructure
 - Health, well-being and inequalities
 - Transport, movement and active travel
 - Spatial Strategy

Consultation

24. At this stage, no formal consultation has yet been undertaken. However, the proposed scoping consultation will need to conform to Regulation 20 of the Local Planning Regulations³, which involves:
- Engagement with ‘specific consultation bodies’ (statutory consultees) including neighbouring authorities, infrastructure providers, and government agencies
 - Early engagement with ‘general consultees’ including local communities, interest groups, businesses, and landowners
 - Any other persons/groups the authority considers appropriate.
25. The consultation must run for a minimum of 21 days and will be designed to maximise accessibility, including digital platforms and clear supporting materials.

³ [The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#)

26. As part of the consultation and engagement strategy for the Local Plan we consider it appropriate for the scoping consultation to be released citywide so that residents can engage with the consultation. We also intend to have targeted consultation with key stakeholders including developers, environmental groups, public service providers and under-represented groups. The approval of the final consultation and engagement strategy is pending and delegated to the Director of City Development.
27. We have a requirement to record who was invited and how the consultation was undertaken in a consultation summary. The feedback received will be analysed and the consultation report reported to Members as part of the next stage of Local Plan preparation. This includes demonstration of this process as part of proceeding through Gateway 1.

Options

28. Executive agreed to the initiating a New Local Plan and progressing to meet Gateway 1 by October 2026. On this basis, a scoping consultation must take place. Members are consequently presented with the following options:
 - **Option 1:** Endorse the proposed scoping consultation approach
 - **Option 2:** Suggest a revised scoping approach or targeted engagement

Analysis

29. **Option 1: Endorse the proposed approach**

The suggested approach reflects upon the recently adopted Local Plan and the emerging national legislative reforms and is recommended. The key advantages are considered to be:

 - Provides a clear, structured start to plan-making based on looking back at the previous approach and looking ahead to what's coming;
 - supports compliance with national expectations and expected changes in the NPPF;
 - identifies the existing evidence base and asks for further evidence submissions;
 - Will have transparency and engagement citywide.
30. **Option 2: Revised approach**

A revised approach to scoping will need to consider what is emerging through local policy. However, Members could choose this option to which would allow further tailoring of the consultation to local circumstances or the engagement to be undertaken. A significantly different approach may introduce delays to the process and impact on overall timescales.

Council Plan

31. The preparation of a new Local Plan directly supports the Council Plan (2023–2027) priorities, including:
 - Delivering sustainable and inclusive growth
 - Addressing housing needs
 - Tackling climate change and promoting environmental sustainability
 - Supporting economic development and infrastructure delivery
32. The scoping consultation contributes to these priorities by ensuring that the Local Plan is evidence-led, community-informed, and aligned with strategic objectives.

Implications

33. Financial- Costs will be associated with consultation design, engagement activities, and evidence gathering. These will be met from existing planning policy budgets.
34. Human Resources (HR) - Staff resources within the Strategic Planning Policy team will be required to prepare and manage the consultation.
35. Equalities - The consultation will be designed to ensure inclusive engagement, including accessible materials and targeted outreach.
36. Legal -The Local Plan process is governed by statutory requirements. Early consultation supports compliance with legal duties, including the duty to cooperate.
37. Crime and Disorder- There are no direct crime and disorder implications.
38. Information Technology (IT) - Digital platforms will be used to facilitate consultation and improve accessibility.
39. Property- There are no direct property implications at this stage.

40. Other- There are no other significant implications identified.

Risk Management

41. Key risks include:

- Insufficient engagement leading to a weak evidence base
- Delays impacting the Local Plan timetable
- Changes in national policy during plan preparation

42. These risks will be mitigated through early consultation, robust project management, and ongoing monitoring of policy changes.

Contact Details

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Wards Affected:		All	X
For further information please contact the author of the report			

Background Papers:

Executive 14 April 2026 - [Decision - Plan-making activity and Local Plan Review](#)

Annexes

Annex A – MHCLG 30-month plan-making overview

Annex B – Local Plan Scoping: draft challenges to address.

List of Abbreviations Used in this Report

- Local Plan (LP)
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA)