

**Minutes of the Environment and Sustainability Committee  
26 April 2022**

**Present:**

Councillor I.J. Beardsmore (Chairman)  
Councillor O. Rybinski (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

M.M. Attewell	T. Fidler	V.J. Leighton
M. Beecher	K.M. Grant	S.C. Mooney
J.T.F. Doran	N. Islam	J.R. Sexton

**Substitutions:** Councillors L. E. Nichols and J. Vinson

**Apologies:** Councillors R. Dunn and V. Siva

**In Attendance:** Councillors C. Bateson and R.W. Sider, BEM

**33/22 Disclosures of Interest**

There were none.

**34/22 Questions from members of the Public**

Two questions were received from members of the public:

**Question 1 – Mr. Alan Doyle**

“With regard to the “Visioning” process, can you please advise:

1. How many planning consultants were asked to bid for the task of facilitating the "Visioning" process for our Local Plan?
2. How much money was spent by the Council on the "Visioning" process for our Local Plan?"

**Response from the Chair, Cllr. Ian Beardsmore:**

“In response to the first part of your question, this process was led and undertaken by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council – strategic planning officers were not involved in the appointment, the workshops, or the compilation of the report. The Leader and Deputy Leader directly appointed Catriona Riddell Associates (which the Chief Executive confirmed to the Leader) and no other consultants were asked to bid for the task.

I need to clarify that I played no role in this either. As Chair of the Local Plan Task Group and the councillor who as such actually 'carries the can' for the Local Plan It would have been both courtesy and common sense to let me see the brief. Neither courtesy nor common sense were forthcoming and to this day I have never seen the brief.

For clarification the idea to proceed with this consultation was agreed by the whole committee with at least some understanding that there may only be one candidate. However, the proper process for such things is that officers prepare the brief trying to capture what the promoters want, whilst obviously protecting the legal position of the Council. This was done. What later transpired is that this professional brief, without any consultation, was rejected totally! Crucially had members realised at the time this sleight of hand was to be played on them, I do not think it would have got the level support it did. I, for one, would have opposed it had I known this was going to happen.”

In answer to the second part of your question; the total cost including VAT was £4,200.00 for facilitation and preparation for three workshops and drafting of the Vision and Objectives,”

**Question 2 – Mr. Alan Doyle**

“How much has been budgeted for the development of an alternative Local Plan to present to the Planning Inspectorate (which has been the subject of much discussion in Council forums), and in which it is proposed that the housing target set by the Whitehall department would not be met in full.”

**Response from the Chairman, Cllr. Ian Beardsmore:**

“There is no money budgeted for to produce an alternative Local Plan strategy. Current budget forecasts are on the basis of the strategy agreed by Environment & Sustainability Committee on 13 July 2021, to include completion of evidence and the examination costs, such as legal representation and the fee to the Planning Inspectorate. The cost for the financial year 21/22 (not all the bills are in yet) will be around £435k. Next year the costs are likely to be in the order of £125,000 to £200,000 for the financial year 2022/23, during which we are anticipating the draft Local Plan to be submitted and examined.

Aside from the extensive delay most of the costs incurred this year would have to be repeated if we went in a new direction at this very late stage.

Much of the technical evidence has now been completed by expert consultants and factored into remaining costs. To consider an alternative plan would require the production of new evidence to support a different direction, which would include housing market assessment, viability work, transport modelling, strategic flood risk assessment etc, as it's not as simple as lifting sites out of the Plan to reach a lower housing figure. All strategies need to be evidenced and should an alternative plan be rejected by the Planning Inspectorate, which we anticipate would be the case if we are not meeting our housing need, it is likely that some of the evidence produced to support the

original plan would by then need to be updated. It is difficult to put a figure on all this but it would run into hundreds of thousands of pounds and add at least 12- 18 months to the Local Plan timetable.

I would also like to take this opportunity to clarify the position should the government change our housing numbers. In that event some of the costs and delays outlined here in respect of new infrastructure reports would still be incurred. What, would depend on the precise nature of the changes. The big difference is we would not incur those costs and delays associated with the extensive difficulties of trying to cobble together some sort of new evidence base that attempted to justify the change of direction because the new figure would have come from the government.“

### **35/22 Pre-Submission Publication Version of the Local Plan and Draft Staines Development Framework Publication**

The Chair moved, and it was seconded by Cllr Rybinski that all resolutions on this item were referred to full Council. This was agreed unanimously.

The Strategic Planning Manager presented her report, setting out the benefits of the draft Local Plan and Staines Development Framework and outlining the extensive process undertaken to date. Both had reached key milestones in the preparation process and the Committee’s agreement was sought to publish planning documents for public consultation. For the Local Plan, this was Regulation 19 stage, where the pre-submission version would be open to final public consultation prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate.

Questions and concerns were raised by the Committee on a range of issues and it was agreed that these would be included in the list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and made available on the Council’s website.

The Strategic Planning Manager undertook to notify Committee members of any minor changes and corrections to the draft Local Plan, it was envisaged that these would only be small tweaks or changes prior to the Council meeting on 19 May.

In response to a question from a member, the Committee was advised that the list of brownfield sites was in the Strategic Land Availability Assessment (SLAA) which had been published in January and was available on the Council’s website. The SLAA didn’t form part of the local plan but provided evidence to underpin it. Officers were in the process of updating this and it would be published on the website shortly, The Local Plan Task Group had been regularly notified of changes to the list.

Members of the Committee requested that the percentage of green belt to be released should be expressed in size and not just as a percentage of the total amount within the borough. Some considered it misleading that the green belt area included reservoirs and that should be made clear in the document.

Assurance was sought on the future safeguarding of leisure facilities in Sunbury. Members were advised that this would be assessed in future needs and at the 5 year stage, however this did not allay concerns and the Strategic Planning Manager undertook to raise this with the Assets and Leisure Services team prior to the Council meeting.

Other issues and matters raised ranged from the implications and sanctions of not delivering on our housing numbers, the need to ensure affordable housing is delivered and is truly affordable, and whether infrastructure can be delivered early before development, through to zoning within Staines and proposed exemptions policy, whether the Plan is in line with the Climate change Act, what happens if the government lowers our housing number after the adoption of the Local Plan and when does the Local Plan take effect.

The Committee **resolved**:

1. To refer their resolutions on this item to Council for final decision.
2. To make the following recommendations to Council:
  - That the Pre-Submission Publication Version of the Local Plan be published for public consultation under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended).
  - That the draft Staines Development Framework be published for public consultation.
  - That public consultation for both the Pre-Submission Publication version of the Local Plan and draft Staines Development Framework run from 15 June 2022 to 5 September 2022.
  - That the Local Plan Task Group and the Staines Development Task Group consider the specific requirements around the most appropriate public consultation mechanisms.
  - To authorise the Strategic Planning Manager to make minor changes and corrections to the documents prior to publication, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee.