



Committee: PLANNING POLICY CABINET ADVISORY GROUP

Date: TUESDAY, 13 JANUARY 2026

Venue: HYBRID: LTH OR VIA TEAMS

Time: 2.00 P.M.

A G E N D A

1. Apologies

2. Minutes

To receive as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting (*n.b. 13th January 2026 is the first meeting of the PPCAG*).

3. Items of Urgent Business

To consider any such items authorised by the Chair and to consider where in the agenda the item(s) are to be considered.

4. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations by Councillors of interests in respect of items on this Agenda.

Councillors are reminded that, in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, they are required to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests which have not already been declared in the Council's Register of Interests. (It is a criminal offence not to declare a disclosable pecuniary interest either in the Register or at the meeting).

Whilst not a legal requirement, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9 and in the interests of clarity and transparency, Councillors should declare any disclosable pecuniary interests which they have already declared in the Register, at this point in the meeting.

In accordance with Part B Section 2 of the Code Of Conduct, Councillors are required to declare the existence and nature of any other interests as defined in paragraphs 8(1) or 9(2) of the Code of Conduct.

5. Item 1: National Changes to the Plan-Making System and its Implications for Lancaster District (Pages 3 - 8)

6. Item 2: Lancaster District Local Plan Review Update (Pages 9 - 13)

7. Date of the next meeting

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

(i) Membership

Councillors Sue Tyldesley (Chair), Louise Belcher, Dave Brookes, Keith Budden, Andrew Otway, Jean Parr, Joyce Pritchard, Sandra Thornberry and Paul Tynan (and one vacancy: Green group) (and one vacancy: MBI group)

(ii) Substitute Membership

Councillors Claire Cozler, Alan Greenwell and Paul Newton (and one vacancy: Green group) (and one vacancy: MBI group)

(iii) Queries regarding this Agenda

Please contact Eric Marsden, Democratic Support - tel: 01524 582000, or email: emarsden@lancaster.gov.uk

(iv) Changes to Membership, substitutions or apologies

Please contact Democratic Support email democraticssupport@lancaster.gov.uk.

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DALTON SQUARE,
LANCASTER, LA1 1PJ

Published on 6th January 2026.

Planning Policy Cabinet Advisory Group – 13th January 2026**Item 1: National Changes to the Plan-Making System and its Implications for Lancaster District****1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 PPCAG Members will be aware that for some time local planning authorities who are in the early stages of plan-making (as we are in Lancaster) are expected to be advancing their new local plans under a new system of plan-making.
- 1.2 This has presented challenges to many authorities, including here in Lancaster, not in the least due to the limited amount of guidance and direction provided by Government on the processes involved in this new plan-making system. Whilst some degree of information has been presented via past [Government consultations](#) on potential changes and, more latterly, through [correspondence](#) from the Government's Chief Planning Officer, the level of detail around where local planning authorities should go next with their emerging plans has been vague.
- 1.3 However, in the latter part of 2025 further information and direction has been provided by Government on the key stages of the new plan-making process which has either gone to re-affirm earlier expectations or to provide more detail on the relative roles and responsibilities for planning authorities moving forward.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to set out and clarify the nature of these key stages of plan-making and their implications for plan-making in Lancaster District as the Council progresses its Local Plan Review.

2.0 Timeframe for Preparation

- 2.1 A summary of the new plan-making process is set out in Appendix A of this note and this highlights one of the key expectations of Government under this new system. That it wishes to speed up the timescales for preparing local plans to a 30-month period.
- 2.2 Moving forward, the Government have set an expectation that Local Plans should be prepared over no more than 30 months to allow for their content and direction to be more responsive and adaptive to local events.
- 2.3 This, in principle, is a reasonable expectation for the Government make under a new system. For a number of years one of the key criticisms of current local plans is that they take too long to prepare and, in regard to some of its content, the issues that the plan are trying to address have already advanced and changed before the document is formally adopted for planning purposes. In that context, the ambition around speeding up the preparation of plans is something which should be supported.
- 2.4 However, preparing a document which is complex, evidentially based, subject to numerous rounds of consultation and deals with highly controversial matters is not something which can

be undertaken quickly. There are risks to its preparation, many of which are set out in the Council's [Local Plan Initiation Document](#) (LPID) which can have implications on the timeframes of plan-making and can incur delays. Therefore, it is not yet clear whether the ambitions of preparing an evidentially based, thoroughly consulted, Local Plan in that 30-month period can be demonstrated as realistic. Time and experience will tell.

- 2.5 Advice from Government on how to ensure that local planning authorities have the best chance of meeting that 30-month timeframe is simply one of preparedness. Ensuring that substantive element of the evidence base have been completed and some of the early engagement processes have been undertaken appear to be key if local planning authorities are to stand the best chance of advancing plans with 30-months.
- 2.6 It is not yet clear whether there will be any repercussions for local planning authorities for failing to meet its 30-month timeframe for plan-making. Any further direction on this issue will be reported to PPCAG Members.

3.0 Role of Gateway Assessments

- 3.1 A further key element in the new plan-making process which the Government believe will help local planning authorities keep to their 30-month timescales is the inclusion of a series of three gateway assessment at key stages of a plan's preparation.
- 3.2 The role and purpose of these assessments is initially (via Gateway 1) a checklist to make sure the necessary components for preparing a sound and robust plan are in place before the latter two assessments provide recommendations and advice to the local planning authority from external, independent, assessors.
- 3.3 The Gateway 1 Assessment takes place following the completion of the first 'Scoping & Early Participation Stage' and prior to work commencing on the 'Visioning & Options' Stage. The Council are now rapidly approaching that stage and, as the second agenda item suggests, work will begin on that self-assessment Gateway 1 process shortly.
- 3.4 **It is important to note that the publication of the Gateway 1 Assessment represents the formal start of that 30-month plan-making process and so it is critically important that the Council recognises the implications of publishing the assessment and that it is ready to make efficient and effective progress in its preparation of the new Local Plan.**
- 3.5 The Gateway 2 Assessment takes place in advance of the Council publishing a draft Local Plan and will involve an independent assessor (likely from the Planning Inspectorate) providing recommendations on the content and direction of the emerging local plan. The recommendations from that independent assessor are indicated to be 'advisory' and therefore the Council can either seek to follow those recommendations or (with due reason) disregard them. However, given the context and status of the Gateway 3 Assessment (as set out in paragraph 3.6) serious consideration should be given to the implications of disregarding these 'advisory' recommendations at this early stage.
- 3.6 The final Gateway 3 assessment takes place just before the Council is ready to publish and submit its final version of the Local Plan to Government, thus to commence the Public

Examination process. Again, the Gateway 3 Assess will involve an independent assessor providing recommendations on the emerging Local Plan.

- 3.7 However, unlike the outcomes of the Gateway 2 assessment, the outcomes and recommendations of this final Gateway 3 Assessment are mandatory. This means that the plan cannot advance past this stage if the Council do not follow the recommendations and outcomes of the independent assessor. If the Council seek to not accept the recommendations of the independent assessor at this stage, then the only other alternative is to restart the process. Consequently, it is important re-iterate that dis-regarding any recommendations at the Gateway 2 stage is not an advisable course of action without sound reason.
- 3.8 The aim of the three Gateway Assessments is to ensure that Local Plans are being prepared in sound and robust manner from the outset and emerging issues which could affect that soundness are dealt with prior to the finalisation of the plan and the commencement of Public Examination. It is well documented that the length of some public examinations can take years due to the major issues not being dealt with prior to the formal submission of the plan to Government.

4.0 Drafting, Consulting and Preparing the Local Plan

- 4.1 As PPCAG Members will note from Appendix A, the other key stages of the plan-making process remain relatively unchanged from the previous system. There remains a requirement for the Council to publish a draft version of a Local Plan for public consultation, and it is anticipated that this draft Local Plan contains preferred options around issues such as site allocations and policy positions.
- 4.2 The publication of a draft Local Plan still provides the opportunity to consider any consultation responses from key stakeholders and refine the content and direction of the plan accordingly.
- 4.3 Following consultation on the draft Local Plan, any refinement required from consultation responses and a successful outcome to a Gateway 3 assessment. The Council will be able to proceed to Publication and Submission of the Plan to Government. Again, these are familiar steps to the previous system as is the role of Public Examination.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that the time taken for the Public Examination Stage should be reduced, as any fundamental issues with the content and direction of the plan will be addressed through the prior three Gateway Assessments (particularly Gateway 3). It is still anticipated that the Examination sessions will be held by an independent Planning Inspector who will conclude on the soundness of the Plan in the context of national planning policy.
- 4.5 Following a successful Examination the Council will be in a position to formally adopt the Plan for planning purposes.

5.0 Key Issues for Lancaster District

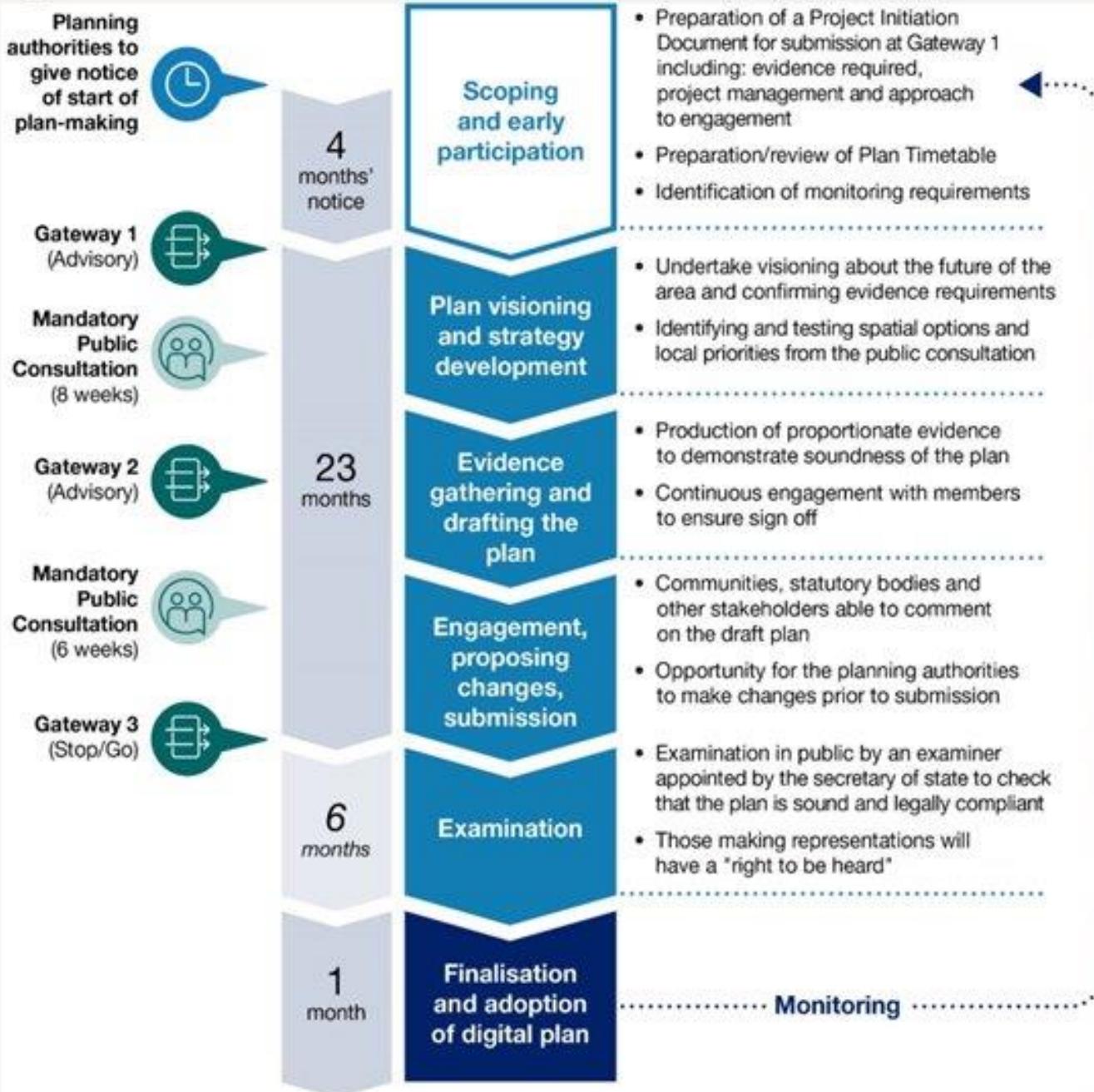
- 5.1 In regard to the new timetables for plan-making, the Council have been preparing for this eventuality for some time. Indeed, the Council's latest [Local Development Scheme](#), published in April 2025 has already factored in the need to condense some of the key stages of plan making into this 30-month timeframe.
- 5.2 Furthermore, mindful of the need to complete as much preparatory work as possible before commencing the formal 30-month plan-making process, the Council have made good progress in advancing a wide range of the necessary evidence base which is needed to inform the content and direction of the plan. This process has been ongoing for the last 18 months and PPCAG (formerly LPRG) Members have been updated on the wide-ranging evidence which has been prepared. Whilst there remains evidence work to undertake during the course of 2026 and into 2027, the Council is well position in regard to its evidence base.
- 5.3 Coupled with the evidence, the Council is also in a favourable position in regard to the extent of early consultation which has already been undertaken to scope the context of the plan and the issues which need to be prepared. Through the course of 2024 the Council undertook consultation on matters of scope and key issues which, whilst prepared under the old plan-making system, outcomes remain equally valid now. This consultation has also been supplemented by a further round of 'Scoping & Early Participation' which is a requirement of the new system.
- 5.4 Whilst the Council are well placed to meet the timeframes for plan-making envisaged by the new system, there remain a number of risks that could impact on the timescale for the local plan. These are well described in the Council's Local Plan Initiation Document (LPID) and will need to be key under review as the local plan progresses.
- 5.5 In regard to the Gateway Assessments, the independent assessment of the emerging Local Plan at Gateway 2 and 3 should provide a beneficial and objective view on some of the key issues that the plan many be facing. In this context, the outcomes and recommendations of the independent assessor should be welcomed and, where appropriate, acted upon in an objective manner. Doing so should ensure that the Council can have confidence that the Plan should be found sound when reaching the examination stage.
- 5.6 However, there is an inherent risk that should the independent assessor's recommendations and outcomes not be followed at either stage that the Local Plan will not be able to reach examination and cannot be completed. It is therefore important that at both assessment stages that all key issues are explored fully and the local planning authority are fully aware of the implications of the recommendations and outcomes identified.

6.0 Publication of National Planning Policy Framework (December 2025)

- 6.1 To supplement the changes to the plan-making process, the Government published its new National Planning Policy Framework on 17 December for consultation. The Framework remains the starting point in regard to the establishing the content and direction of Local Plans.

6.2 There have been a number of changes proposed within the new Framework, the greatest of which being the inclusion of a wide range of non-statutory national development management policies. Officers are currently considering the implications of the new Framework and will be drafting up a response to the ongoing consultation. Members of both PPCAG and Planning Committee will be updated with the proposed changes to the Framework, their implications locally, and the proposed consultation response in due course.

Appendix A: Overall Summary of the New Plan-Making Process

Figure 1: The new 30 month plan timeframe

Planning Policy Cabinet Advisory Group – 13th January 2026**Item 2: Lancaster District Local Plan Review Update****1.0 Introduction**

1.1 This report has been prepared to provide an update on progress on the preparation of the new Local Plan for the District. It reports on the emerging feedback that we have received from the current scoping consultation as well as an update on the evidence base being prepared. The report also provides an update on the work programme for the coming months detailing the next stage of consultation and importantly the first Gateway milestone.

2.0 Local Plan Scoping Consultation

2.1 As noted from the previous Local Plan Review Group meetings, the City Council commenced a first stage of the new plan-making process via a stage of [Scoping & Early Participation](#) on the 26 September 2025. This initial consultation stage is aimed to promote the role and purpose of the Local Plan to wider stakeholders and is required to be undertaken for no less than 4 months. The Scoping & Early Participation stage is currently on-going and will conclude on Monday 22 January 2026.

2.2 PPCAG Members will be aware that this current stage of consultation under the new plan-making system, builds on earlier scoping and issues engagement which took place using the old plan making system through the course of 2024. Whilst these earlier stages engagement (Scoping and Issues & Opportunities) took place using that old system, the role and purpose of that engagement remains the same and the feedback provided by stakeholders at that time remains equally valid as any responses provided under the current engagement.

2.3 Mindful that many stakeholders engaged in those earlier rounds of consultation in 2024, to date only a further three consultation comments have been received. This includes representations from Lancashire County Council Education Team reaffirming the need to ensure that future housing growth is supported by funding for new school places, Persimmon Homes highlighting the need to ensure our housing requirement is delivered as well as further comments in relation to future potential policy requirements, and North Yorkshire Council confirming their continued co-operation in any cross-boundary issues.

2.4 Officers will continue to keep this under review and will prepare a new Consultation Report detailing the full details of the consultation responses received together with those provided in the earlier 2024 consultation. This will be reported to Members at the next PPCAG meeting.

3.0 Local Plan Evidence Base Update

3.1 Officers have continued to progress work on the Local Plan evidence base in order to ensure that its content and direction is based on a sound evidential position. Evidence which is ongoing includes the following.

Morecambe Bay Visitor Survey

- 3.2 As reported previously the City Council in partnership with Westmoreland and Furness Council and Wyre Borough Council have commissioned Morecambe Bay Partnership to undertake visitor surveys across several locations around Morecambe Bay.
- 3.3 Morecambe Bay is the largest intertidal area in the UK and is of international importance for the wildlife and habitats it supports, including breeding and overwintering water birds which can be susceptible to disturbance. One of the main sources of disturbance comes through increased recreational use. This is noted to be a key issue for Morecambe Bay with recreational pressure regularly highlighted as one of the main factors threatening this important protected environment.
- 3.4 To better understand this, we require evidence to understand where visitors are coming from and the purpose of their visit. This work will be used to support the preparation of our Local Plans with the work being used to better understand how far people travel and the impact that new residential development may have on the Bay based on its distance from designated sites. The need to understand this is essential to the preparation of our Local Plan and will be a key source of information informing each Local Plan's Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).
- 3.5 The surveys are being undertaken face to face by Footprint Ecology. The first set of survey work was undertaken in October. Further surveys will be undertaken in January and February 2026. The details of this work will be reported to members as soon as it is available.

Local Housing Need Assessment

- 3.6 A final report from external consultants Opinion Research Services (ORS) is expected in the coming weeks and it is anticipated that it will be reported to the next PPCAG meeting. This will be followed by a a briefing to Cabinet and All Members on its findings in due course.
- 3.7 The assessment uses the Standard Methodology housing requirement figure as the starting point and considers the type, tenure and size of homes required and requirements for homes to meet specialist needs across the district for the plan period.

Gypsy and Traveller Assessment

- 3.8 Consultants ORS have also been commissioned to provide an assessment of the accommodation needs of the gypsy and traveller community. A survey team has been out in the district carrying out engagement with the gypsy and traveller community. There has also been engagement with various authorities and health providers. Surveys have also been sent out the Parish/Town Councils.
- 3.9 The conclusions of this work are again expected in the next few months and will be reported to this group once available.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

- 3.10 The SFRA part 1, an assessment of risk across the wider district, has been completed and published. The next stage is an assessment of potential sites for flood risk. External consultants JBA are undertaking this work. They will complete the site assessment identifying different

types and severity of flood risks and providing the information in a table format for all potential sites. The site assessment information will inform the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment.

3.11 A series of more detailed site-specific assessments (SFRA 2s) will then be carried out by JBA. These detailed assessments will be carried out for sites with more complex flood risk and will focus on whether flood risk can be mitigated and what measures can be accommodated on or off the site to reduce flood risk elsewhere.

Coastal Change Management Areas Assessment (CCMA)

3.12 This will assess the impact of coastal change (sea level rise/erosion) and consider potential policies for the area likely to be affected over the next 100 years. Engagement is also ongoing with various infrastructure providers to determine the measures they may have in place for long term flood protection. Following discussion with elected Members, it is anticipated there will be engagement with coastal communities over the coming months.

Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)

3.13 One of the biggest evidence base areas under preparation by the team relates to the SHELAA. As members will be aware from previous meetings Officers have been busy compiling and identifying a list of potential sites for development. This includes information submitted by members of the public and other stakeholders via the call for site process.

3.14 Officers are now looking to assess these sites to determine their deliverability. This includes assessing their suitability, availability and achievability. A comprehensive database has been prepared to manage this process.

3.15 Additional information is also being collected by Officers to support this assessment. This includes the SFRA as set out above, heritage and ecological assessments being undertaken in-house by the Council's Conservation Team and the Council's Biodiversity Officer.

3.16 Officers are also in the process of commissioning Landscape Consultants to undertake landscape assessments on potential sites. Progress on this should be able to be reported at the meeting. Officers will continue to keep members informed of this important area of work through the new year.

Landscape Sensitivity for Renewable Energy & Net Zero Projects

3.17 Consultants will be shortly commissioned to undertake landscape sensitivity work to identify areas which will be more suitable (in landscape terms) for the siting of renewable energy and net zero scheme. This will specifically focus on the delivery of wind, solar and battery schemes to assess the impact that such development will have on local landscapes.

3.18 The intention of the commission will be to identify areas which are more suitable and have more capacity in the landscape to accommodate such schemes. These areas of suitability can then ultimately be identified as areas of suitability within the forthcoming Local Plan Review.

Green Belt Review

- 3.19 Another important evidence base now under pressure relates to the District's Green Belt. Officers have recently commissioned external consultants AECOM to undertake a review of the Green Belt in light of changes to national planning policy, primarily the introduction of the concept of Grey Belt.
- 3.20 AECOM will be using the 2016 Green Belt Review as a starting point and will be reassessing the parcels in relation to the new national planning policy. Through this work they will be looking to determine whether any areas could be considered to be Grey Belt. This work will be used to by the City Council to determine whether any alterations to Green Belt boundaries should be made and whether any areas of the current Green Belt should be identified as Grey Belt.

Local Green Space

- 3.21 PPCAG Members will be aware that the Council previously undertook a call for sites inviting interested parties to submit sites that they would like to be designated as a Local Green Space in the new Local Plan.
- 3.22 Local Green Spaces are areas of green spaces which can be shown to be demonstrably special to the local community and under national planning policy are assigned a higher level of protection than most areas of green space across the Country. They can be special for a number of reasons – historical, recreation, sport or as a valuable feature in the landscape.
- 3.23 A call for sites was undertaken over the summer. These sites together with existing Local Green Spaces designated in the adopted Local Plan will now be reassessed using the Council's already agreed methodology to determine whether they should be designated for protection in the new Local Plan.

4.0 Lancaster District Local Plan Review – Next Stages

- 4.1 As set out in the earlier agenda item, work on the Lancaster District Local Plan Review will continue to progress in line with the requirements of this new plan-making system. Moving forward over the course of early 2026 the following stages will be undertaken.

Preparing the Gateway 1 Self-Assessment

- 4.2 As identified in the earlier agenda items, the new plan-making system is underpinned by a series of three gateway assessments. The first gateway assessment, which should be undertaken following the Scoping & Early Participation Stage but prior to any formal work being undertaken on visioning and options, is a self-assessment report which should be prepared by Officers to ensure the Council are ready to begin the formal 30-months of plan making.
- 4.3 **It is important to note that the publication of the Gateway 1 Self-Assessment is the formal point that the 30-month plan-making process commences.** On the publication of the assessment, it will be critical that the Council are happy that the necessary initial elements of the plan-making process are in place so they can be as confident as possible that the preparation of the Local Plan Review can be achieved in these timeframes.

4.4 A template for completing the assessment has now been published. A readiness checker is also available and can be viewed from the following link [Gateway 1: what you need to do - GOV.UK](#). For information the assessment will look at the following areas:

- Whether a local plan timetable has been prepared and published
- project management and governance arrangements about the preparation of the plan
- approach to consulting and engaging on the plan
- anticipated content of the plan
- progress on the the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the plan.

4.5 Following the completion of the Scoping & Early Participation Stage, officers will begin to prepare the Gateway 1 Self-Assessment Report before seeking the necessary endorsement from Members in due course.

Preparing for Visioning and Options Stage

4.6 Following the publishing of the Council's Gateway 1 assessment and the commencement of that 30-month process, Officers will rapidly look to publish and consult a draft vision for the Local Plan Review and a series of spatial and policy options. Specifically, this consultation should focus on the following:

- A: A proposed vision for the local planning authority's area and proposed measurable outcomes.
- B: Any proposed aims and objectives of the local planning authority, including how they propose to achieve the vision.
- C: A summary of the local planning authority's proposed approach in relation to planning policies (which could include proposed site allocation policies).
- D: A summary of the evidence intended to support the local plan, including any relevant updates to the Council's [Local Plan Initiation Document](#) (LPID).
- E: Any further supporting information the local planning authority considers appropriate

4.7 The current timetable for plan preparation, as set out in the April 2025 [Local Development Scheme](#), anticipates this consultation taking place on these matters during the Spring of 2026.

Progressing towards a Draft Local Plan

4.8 Following on from the publication of the Visioning & Options Stage, progression will then focus on reflecting on the consultation responses as Officers begin to draft a new Local Plan which is anticipated to be ready for publication for the end of 2026 / early 2027.