

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.