

# Cheltenham Borough Council

**Council – 11 December 2023**

## **Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan – Public Consultation (Regulation 18)**

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**Accountable member:**

Cllr Hay, Leader

**Accountable officer:**

Tracey Birkinshaw, Director Communities & Economic Development

**Ward(s) affected:**

All

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**Key Decision:** Yes

**Executive summary:**

In July 2023, Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Councils resolved to work together to prepare a single Strategic and Local Plan (SLP). This will replace the existing Joint Core Strategy (JCS) and district local plans. At this formative stage in the process, the task is to undertake public consultation on broad spatial options and policy issues in line with Regulation 18 of the relevant legislation. The statutory purpose of the consultation is to ask people what they think the Plan should contain and help inform emerging priorities. No policy or site allocation proposals are therefore being put forward at this stage. That will follow at a subsequent step in the Regulation 18 process in early 2025.

In summary, the consultation document contains a draft Vision and Strategic Objectives and poses a number of questions around options for addressing climate change and nature recovery, the amount and location of future housing and economic development, Gypsies and traveller accommodation, retail and town centres and infrastructure. The document as presented is at an early stage of our plan making and the purpose of this consultation is to gain the views of all our stakeholders – nothing at this stage is ruled in or out and all elements of the SLP is open for debate as outlined in section 3 of this report.

It is being proposed to publish the document and invite comment from our various communities, the development industry, infrastructure/service providers and others with an interest in growth for a period of not less than 8 weeks commencing in December 2023. This will allow for the consultation spanning the Christmas period.

Cheltenham is the last of the 3 councils to consider the consultation document for approval with Gloucester and Tewkesbury agreeing the document unanimously with no changes.

## Recommendations:

- 1. The Strategic and Local Plan Consultation Document (Appendix 1) be approved for consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.**
  - 2. Authority be delegated to the Director of Communities & Economic Development, in consultation with the Leader, to prepare visual representations to illustrate the general location of development options for inclusion in the consultation document, and to make any other necessary minor amendments, corrections and additions to the document prior to publication for consultation.**
  - 3. Council to note the update provided at appendix 3 in respect of the Honeybourne Line extension debated at Council on 19th June 2023.**
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## 1. Implications

### 1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

A budget of £220k per year per district council (Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury) was agreed earlier in the year after work was commissioned to evaluate the resources needed to produce the next strategic and local plan. This includes the base contribution of £60k which is currently paid by the Council. The £220k contribution in 2023/24 will be in part funded by an earmarked reserve with the remaining amount and future profile of funding being reflected in the budget papers for 2024/25. There are no direct property or asset implications of the recommendations for approval in this report but some of our future decisions on our land, buildings and development opportunities will be influenced by the implementation of the Strategic Local Plan. In addition, Gloucestershire County Council contribute £60k per year.

**Signed off by:** Director of Finance & Assets, [gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### 1.2 Legal implications

In preparing a local plan, under regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, a local planning authority must notify:

- consultation bodies that may have an interest in the subject of the proposed local plan/as the local planning authority considers appropriate; and
- such residents and other persons carrying on business in the local planning authority's area which it considers appropriate to invite representations

of the subject matter of the local plan which it proposes to prepare and invite them to make representations about what a local plan with that subject ought to contain.

The local planning authority must take into account any representations made to them in response to those invitations and may carry out more than one Regulation 18 consultation in preparing a local plan. There is

no minimum period for consultation at this stage of the plan making process, as opposed to the Pre-Submission stage which requires a minimum of 6 weeks.

Under section 19(3) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 in preparing the local plan the authority must also comply with their statement of community involvement.

**Signed off by:** One Legal - [legalservices@onelegal.org.uk](mailto:legalservices@onelegal.org.uk)

### **1.3 Environmental and climate change implications**

The SLP will be a plan to meet development needs in a way which achieves sustainable development, including addressing the causes of climate change, mitigating its effects and promoting nature recovery. The SLP will also include policies to safeguard against other environmental effects of development. All local plans are required to be informed throughout their preparation by a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment. A draft SA report has been prepared to inform this Regulation 18 stage, including evaluating the likely sustainability effects of the draft vision, objectives, and spatial options.

The emerging Plan is also required to be accompanied by a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to ensure adverse impacts on international habitats sites are avoided or, where this is not possible, effectively mitigated. A draft HRA has similarly been prepared to inform this Regulation 18 stage.

Both documents will be available to view on-line. This is an iterative process and future versions will inform decision making on the emerging Plan as the SLP progresses.

**Signed off by:** Climate Emergency Officer [Maizy.McCann@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:Maizy.McCann@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### **1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities**

This report contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Making Cheltenham the Cyber Capital of the UK
- Working with residents, communities and businesses to help make Cheltenham #netzero by 2030
- Increasing the number of affordable homes through our £180m housing investment plan
- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity

### **1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications**

Assessed at later stages. The emerging SLP will be accompanied by Equalities and Health Impact Assessments

**Signed off by:** Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships, [Richard.gibson@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.gibson@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### **1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review**

The outcome of the proposed consultation will be used to frame the preparation of a draft Plan in line with the Local Development Scheme and the statutory procedures.

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## **2 Background**

- 2.1 In July 2023, the Borough Council approved a Local Development Scheme (LDS) for the preparation of a new Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan (SLP). Around the same time, Tewkesbury Borough Council and Gloucester City Council approved a similar LDS, supporting the progression of the SLP.
- 2.2 The SLP will set out the strategic development strategy; development requirements (for example new homes and jobs); cross-boundary strategic and other policies where there is value in a consistent approach; and 'locality policies', which address issues and opportunities of only local significance.
- 2.3 Once adopted, the SLP will supersede the adopted Joint Core Strategy (JCS), Tewkesbury Borough Plan, the district plans for Cheltenham and Gloucester councils and any saved policies, in their entirety.
- 2.4 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Council to hold the first full consultation on the emerging SLP.

### **3 Purpose of the consultation**

- 3.1 We all know it's good to talk and talking about planning for our area is no exception. This is why the Regulation 18 consultation is an important part of having an open and honest conversation with our stakeholders whether this be residents, interested groups, businesses, visitors or developers. As we move through the journey on the preparation of the SLP there will be areas of the plan that will generate lots of interest, particularly when a proposal involves change, but we need to navigate change in a positive way, and this includes understanding the different priorities of stakeholders. We hope that our stakeholders will embrace the process and be engaged in the areas that matter to them.
- 3.2 At this early stage, the purpose of the consultation is to:
  - Introduce the concept of the SLP, the timeframe it should cover and explore the issues the SLP should seek to address.
  - Present and consult on a draft Vision and draft Strategic Objectives, drawing on existing plans and council priorities, strategies and commitments.
  - Explore what will constitute a 'strategic matter' where a single cross-authority policy approach is necessary or desirable, and what are local matters relevant to individual councils or localities only.
  - Consider how the SLP can deliver the legal requirement to adapt and mitigate the implications of climate change, and testing how the statutory development plan can be used to drive action.
  - Consider how much development, such as new homes, retail, employment and infrastructure the SLP should plan for.
  - Consider the alternative options for meeting development needs in ways that deliver genuinely sustainable development, drawing on an updated understanding of the capacity of the main urban areas to accommodate development on brownfield and other sites. To this end, six growth 'scenarios' are identified in the draft document.
- 3.3 At this formative stage in the process, the statutory purpose of a Regulation 18 consultation is to

ask people what they think the Plan should contain and help inform emerging priorities. At this stage we are not yet drilling down into specific policies or identifying land for allocation, this will unfold as we develop the second stage of Regulation 18 and when we get to Regulation 19, this will present a plan we consider is appropriate, robust and sound for submission to the Planning Inspectorate. Accordingly, the consultation document relies on emerging evidence, some of which is new and some updating on that of the JCS. Evidence preparation is an ongoing workstream and will be informed by the findings of the Regulation 18 consultation. There are gaps and we welcome views from stakeholders around how we tackle these.

- 3.4 Once approved by all three SLP authorities, consultation will commence. Cheltenham is the last of the 3 councils to consider the consultation document for approval with Gloucester and Tewkesbury agreeing the document unanimously with no changes.
- 3.5 Consultation will be undertaken in accordance with each council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The consultation will be framed around a series of key questions, supported by events and consultation methods appropriate to the scope of the consultation. It is being proposed to publish the document and invite comment from our various communities, the development industry, infrastructure/service providers and others with an interest in growth for a period of not less than 8 weeks commencing in December 2023. Whilst consultations typically run for a 6-week period, the extended deadline would take into account the intervening Christmas period. As noted above, this is an early stage and part of a stepped Regulation 18 consultation with nothing at this stage ruled in or out.
- 3.6 For the purposes of this consultation a suite of visual representations will be included to help readers of the document interpret the six development scenarios spatially (i.e. in a graphic based format). It should be borne in mind that these will be abstract only at this time and for illustrative purposes as we are not yet at the stage of identifying sites for land allocation. Work is ongoing in respect of the design of these visuals, hence recommendation 2 of this paper.
- 3.7 The consultation document will be accompanied by an emerging evidence base. This will include the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) which Government requires local planning authorities to maintain. The HELAA is a preliminary assessment, including mapping, of individual sites which have been submitted to the Council for consideration as development options. It is important to note, however, that ***the inclusion of land on any accompanying maps or diagrams does not mean it is to be regarded as suitable or even available for development; nor that it will be supported by the local planning authorities. Decisions on preferred options for any sites and locations will only emerge at later stages in the plan-making process*** (as set out below).
- 3.8 The adopted LDS identifies the intended programme for the preparation of the SLP. Following the consultation, which is being proposed in this report, focus will turn to the preparation of a Draft Preferred Options SLP which will include a draft strategy, site allocations and policies. It is scheduled to be published for consultation in early 2025 (also under Regulation 18). To support that stage, it will be necessary to have undertaken a comprehensive body of evidence to justify the Plan and demonstrate its deliverability, including for example detailed transport modelling, an assessment of different site alternatives, and a new assessment of the need for new homes and employment land.
- 3.9 This will be followed by Publication of the Pre-Submission draft SLP (under Regulation 19) in early 2026, followed by Submission to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

## **4 Report back on progress on engagement with Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway**

4.1 Related to the preparation of the SLP is the Council motion debated on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023, relating to the potential opportunity for a northern extension of the Honeybourne Line, between the Prince of Wales Stadium and Swindon Lane and:

- a) potential for this corridor of land to become a sustainable transport link and linear park as far as Swindon Lane, improving public health and boosting the environment.
- b) The potential for this land to help link the main railway line and the town centre to Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway (GWSR), boosting local tourism.

4.2 Appendix 3 provides an update.

## **5 Reasons for recommendations**

5.1 The recommendations of this report enable a key stage of the preparation of the SLP to be actioned.

## **6 Alternative options considered**

6.1 The approach to preparing the SLP was agreed via the [Local Development Scheme](#) adopted by Cabinet on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2023.

## **7 Consultation and feedback**

7.1 Ongoing engagement via SLP Joint Advisory Group, Cheltenham Planning & Liaison Member Working Group together with collective engagement across the 3 councils member groups to ensure joined up discussion.

## **8 Key risks**

8.1 The main risk at this stage relates to the Government's proposal for reform to the planning system, some details of which may emerge during the consultation period. However, the scope of the consultation and the questions that are asked will be relevant regardless of any proposed changes to the planning system.

8.2 As part of the consultation events will be held at external venues. Risk assessments will be undertaken to ensure the safety of staff and the community.

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### **Report author:**

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[tracey.birkinshaw@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:tracey.birkinshaw@cheltenham.gov.uk)

### **Appendices:**

1. Risk Assessment
2. Draft Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan Consultation Document (Regulation 18)

3. Council Motion 19th June 2023: Honeybourne Line extension UPDATE

**Background information:**

[Local Development Scheme](#)

Supporting SLP evidence base (available to view online alongside the draft Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan Consultation Document when formally published for Regulation 18 consultation).

## Appendix 1: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
ID342	If there is a failure to gain political consensus across the partners to reach key milestones & failure to adequately resource work then this would impact on reaching milestones which would lead to delay, costs, lack of delivering statutory part of development plan & potential special measures.	Tracey Birkinshaw	4	4	16	Reduce	Partnership agreement drafted and budget agreed.  Joint Advisory Group (JAG)  SLP Task Group and SLP Steering Group  Planning & Liaison Member Working Group and joint Member meetings  SLP Programme Management  Support from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS)	SLP Task and SLP Steering Group	Ongoing



## **Appendix 2: Draft Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan Consultation Document (Regulation 18)**

### **Appendix 3 Council Motion 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023: Honeybourne Line extension UPDATE**

At a meeting of Council on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023, a motion proposed by Councillor Max Wilkinson and seconded by Councillor Victoria Atherstone was debated. Details can be viewed [here](#). This motion was in two parts;

1. Outlining the challenges of the Honeybourne Line extension from Cheltenham Spa station south to Shelburne Road, with the motion supporting both a petition signed by more than 1,000 residents and work with partners
2. The potential for a northern extension of the Honeybourne Line, between the Prince of Wales Stadium and Swindon Lane and:
  - a. potential for this corridor of land to become a sustainable transport link and linear park as far as Swindon Lane, improving public health and boosting the environment.
  - b. The potential for this land to help link the main railway line and the town centre to Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway (GWSR), boosting local tourism.

As part of this motion, the council asked officers to report back on progress with planning policies, and discussions with Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway at, or before, the Council meeting on 11 December. This note provides an update on progress.

The council's Director of Community & Economic Development met with the Chairman and Finance Director of GWSR on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2023. The purpose of this meeting was to explore the potential as highlighted by the Council motion, but also understand the business plan of GWSR and their future ambitions, opportunities and challenges. At this meeting there was broad discussion around the following:

- The business plan of GWSR and future ambitions
- The context of the above in respect of developing the Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan
- Opportunities for enhanced linkages to GWSR facilities and being part of a wider transport accessibility network linking to the centre of Cheltenham
- Engagement in review of relevant policies as we move to preparation to feed into Regulation 18 stage of the plan (part 2).

It was agreed that GWSR would play an active role in engagement with the SLP team as it prepares for and moves into the development and drafting of policies and allocations. Council officers are committed to proactively engaging with GWSR as part of this process.

In terms of planning policies, it is too early at this stage to detail, and these will be worked up as we move to the stage 2 Regulation 18 consultation. GSWR are keen to be an active and engaged partner as we move through the plan preparation process.