

BOROUGH COUNCIL OF KING'S LYNN & WEST NORFOLK**LOCAL PLAN TASK GROUP**

Minutes from the Meeting of the Local Plan Task Group held on Tuesday, 21st April, 2026 at 10.00 am in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Saturday Market Place, King's Lynn PE30 5DQ

PRESENT: Councillor J Moriarty (Chair)
Councillors R Blunt, C J Crofts (sub), M de Whalley, J Fry, S Lintern,
T Parish and Mrs V Spikings

Officers:

Alex Fradley, Planning Policy Manager
Luke Brown, Senior Policy Planner
Henry Anthony, Graduate Planner
Sandra Homcenko, Assistant Planner

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Sandell (Councillor Crofts substitute).

The Chair thanked Councillor Crofts for being a substitute at the meeting.

2 NOTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 10 February 2026 were agreed as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

6 **MEMBERS PRESENT PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 34**

There were no Members present pursuant to Standing Order 34.

7 **CHAIRMAN'S CORRESPONDENCE (IF ANY)**

There was no Chair's correspondence.

8 **THE NEW PLAN-MAKING SYSTEM (PRESENTATION)**

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Luke Brown and Alex Fradley provided a comprehensive overview of the new Local Plan making system, highlighting its legislative background, key differences from the previous system, and the implications for local authorities.

Luke Brown explained that the new Local Plan making system stemmed from the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) and subsequent planning reforms, with the new draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published in December for consultation (with anticipated final publication being Summer 2026). The system introduced a 30-month timeline for plan preparation, with key milestones and a pre-notification period before the formal start all set out in law.

Key Differences from Previous System: Officers outlined that the new system centralised more planning policy at the national level, limited local policies to local designations and standards, and required a vision with no more 10 measurable outcomes. The process would be more templated and standardised, aiming to accelerate plan adoption and ensure up-to-date local plans.

Consultation and Engagement Requirements: The new system mandated a digital-first approach to consultation, with a high-level scoping consultation at the outset to gather input on engagement preferences and plan scope, rather than detailed policy proposals. Officers emphasised the need to involve the economically active, young people in education, parish councils (including neighbourhood plan groups), and the wider public early in the process. Later in the process is a draft plan consultation and a proposed plan consultation.

Gateway System and Project Management: A new gateway system introduced three formal checkpoints (the first being self-assessment, with second two overseen by the Planning Inspectorate) to ensure plans were on track and issues were addressed early. Officers described the need for rigorous project management to meet the fixed deadlines and highlighted the risks of government intervention if milestones were missed.

Councillor Spikings raised questions about the effect of the transition to a unitary authority and the creation of a mayoral combined authority for Norfolk and Suffolk. Officers clarified that the Government have been clear that plan making must continue and that LGR or Devolution were not reasons to stop or pause plan-making.

Transition to Unitary Authority: Officers confirmed that the County Council would likely be replaced by a unitary authority, and the new authority would be responsible for completing the Local Plan if the current council ceased to exist before adoption. Precedents from other reorganisations were discussed, where new authorities finished inherited plans before starting new ones for their revised boundaries.

Devolution and Spatial Development Strategies: Alex Fradley explained that a new Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) would be required at the combined authority level, setting broad growth and housing numbers, with local plans sitting beneath. However, as the SDS was not yet in place, the emerging local plan would proceed under existing frameworks, with officers already engaging in early discussions about the SDS.

Government Direction to Continue Planning: Officers reiterated that the government had instructed authorities not to pause or delay plan making due to reorganisation or devolution, emphasising the urgency of maintaining progress to address housing and economic growth needs.

Plan Preparation Process and Key Milestones: Luke Brown detailed the step-by-step process for preparing the new Local Plan, including the pre-notification period, scoping consultation, call for sites, evidence base development, and the sequence of gateway checks.

- **Pre-Notification and Scoping Consultation:** The process would begin with a pre-notification period (four months) after notifying the Secretary of State, during which initial work and a high-level scoping consultation were conducted. The consultation sought input on engagement methods and plan scope and was accompanied by a call for sites to identify potential development locations.
- **Call for Sites and Site Assessment:** The call for sites was open and had been extended to maximise submissions, with proactive outreach to previous applicants and landowners. The process would be repeated at key stages to ensure all potential sites were considered, and a comprehensive review of settlement boundaries was underway to inform site selection.
- **Gateway Checks and Timetable:** Three gateways structure the process: Gateway 1 (self-assessment), Gateway 2 (Planning Inspectorate review), and Gateway 3 (Planning Inspectorate

pre-examination check). Each gateway must be passed to proceed, with the 30-month timeline pausing if additional work was required. The timetable included two main public consultations on the draft plan and a final draft before examination.

- **Evidence Base and Resource Management:** Officers were preparing a new evidence base, including housing need, flood risk, infrastructure, and open space studies, often with external consultants. Project management was critical due to the tight schedule, limited team size, and the need to coordinate with other departments and external stakeholders.

Consultation, Engagement, and Communication with Stakeholders: Officers and Councillors discussed strategies for engaging parish councils, the public, and other stakeholders in the plan making process, addressing challenges of communication, digital engagement, and the need for clear, accessible information, with suggestions for improving outreach and collaboration.

- **Public Engagement and Parish Council:** Officers outlined plans for targeted briefings, digital consultations, and limited in-person events for engagement purposes, acknowledging resource constraints that means that Officers would not be attending parish meetings. Councillors were encouraged to act as liaisons and advocates within their communities.
- **Role of Councillors and Local Responsibility:** Councillors were reminded of their responsibility to communicate plan updates to their parishes and communities, with officers providing resources and updates via email and the council website. The importance of collaborative working between officers and members was emphasised.

The Committee adjourned at 11.30 am and reconvened at 11.40 am

Development of the Evidence Base for the Local Plan: Luke Brown and Alex Fradley presented a detailed overview of the emerging evidence base required for the new Local Plan, covering housing need, flood risk, landscape, renewable energy, open space, infrastructure, employment, retail, and specialist accommodation.

- **Housing Need Assessment:** A new housing need assessment was underway to reflect the increased requirement (approximately 1000 homes per year), with a focus on tenure mix, affordable housing, and specialist needs. Consultants had been commissioned, and the assessment would inform site allocations and local policies.
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- **Flood Risk and Water Cycle Studies:** Updated strategic flood risk and water cycle studies were being prepared, incorporating

new national data, climate change projections, and local modelling. Parish councils and local drainage boards would be consulted to ensure local knowledge was captured, and the studies would inform site selection and policy development.

- **Landscape, Open Space, and Green Infrastructure:** A refreshed landscape character assessment would address settlement buffers and coalescence, while a new open space audit and green infrastructure strategy would map existing assets, identify deficiencies, and set local standards for future provision. Parish councils would be consulted on open space mapping.
- **Renewable Energy and Specialist Accommodation:** A renewable energy study would identify suitable locations and types of renewable infrastructure, with a heat map to guide decision making. The Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment would be updated to meet new legal requirements, with early commissioning to avoid consultant bottlenecks.
- **Employment, Retail, and Infrastructure Studies:** Employment land and retail/town centre reviews would be conducted, with input from master planning work in Kings Lynn and Hunstanton. An infrastructure capacity and constraints study would map current provision and identify opportunities for improvement, with close cooperation with the county council and other providers.

RESOLVED: (1) That as a part of the strategic flood risk assessment, and local plan process, at the draft plan consultation stage flooding maps will be made publicly available for comments

(2) That the parish council briefings in June would be used to brief parish councils on the Local Plan process.

(3) That all borough councillors are informed about the Local Plan process and their role in communicating with parish councils as part of the May all Member Briefing Session.

9

LOCAL PLAN TASK GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE (REPORT TO CABINET)

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Officers introduced proposed updates to the Local Plan Task Group's terms of reference, reflecting changes in the planning system and council processes, with the revised document prepared in collaboration with councillors and to be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

RESOLVED: That the Local Plan Task Group supported the draft Cabinet report and proposed changes to its Terms of Reference.

10 **DRAFT LOCAL PLAN VISION & 10 MEASURABLE OUTCOMES
(PRESENTATION)**

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Sandra Homcenko and Henry Anthony presented an initial draft of the Local Plan vision and possible 10 measurable outcomes, inviting feedback and further discussion at the next meeting, with councillors raising questions about housing numbers, measurement, and flood risk assessment.

The new system required a clear vision for the plan period (to 2044) and no more than 10 measurable outcomes. This will be informed by the scoping consultation and be iterative.

The draft outcomes covered housing delivery, choice and mix, sustainable growth, economic development, design quality, health, environmental protection, biodiversity, net zero transition, and infrastructure provision.

The Task Group were invited to review and make suggestions with regard to the SWOT analysis, Vision, and Measurable Outcomes, to be discussed at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would be held on **Tuesday 19 May 2026 at 2.00 pm** in Meeting Room 1:3, King's Court, Chapel Street, King's Lynn.

The meeting closed at 1.02 pm