

Response to Questions at Council

• **What work has been undertaken on the Local Plan since January 2024?**

Since the January 2024 report, further details around the new plan making system have been awaited. Following the General Election, the Government confirmed their commitment to a new streamlined plan making process and extended the deadlines for submission of plans under the older system, also known as legacy plans. The January 2024 Council report sets out why Officers considered a new Local Plan under the emerging plan making system was considered the appropriate route.

As detailed in the report, the new regulation for plan making came into force on the 25th March 2026.

In the period since January 2024, an Officers 'Local Plan Working Group' has been stood up which includes a variety of representatives who will feed into the new plan making process. The group reports into the Councils Project Management Office and associated governance arrangements.

Alongside these arrangements, Officers have scoped out requirements to support the Local Plan process and reviewed the guidance produced by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). This has resulted in the development of a draft Project Initiation Document (PID) and use of PAS's 'readiness checker' both of which will be required to inform the Council's entry into Gateway 1.

With regards to developing the evidence base to support the new Local Plan, to date the following has been undertaken;

- a) traffic surveys have been commissioned, those which have already been completed have also informed an update to the Councils highway model.
- b) A review of the Councils Local Wildlife sites is underway via the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust
- c) Conservation Area Appraisals are also well underway (also see question below)
- d) Work on consultation tools and formation of a consultation database to keep interested parties updated on the progress of the local plan.

• **The original recommendation sought to commence work in advance of the new Local Plan process, why wasn't this original resolution enacted?**

As detailed above, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 came into force on 25 March 2026. This introduces the new regulatory framework for the preparation of Local Plans.

Crucially, until the legislation was introduced it was not possible to commence the local plan under the new plan making system. The regulations also set out some dates where specific milestones must be met, such as;

- Serving a notice of intention to commence plan making by 31 December 2026
- Entering Gateway 1 by 30 April 2027, and no sooner than 4 months before serving the notice of intention.

The regulatory framework for plan making and those above mandatory requirements were not known in January 2024 and subsequently there is no authorisation from Council to undertake those statutory steps.

Consideration at the Council meeting on the 20th May 2026 was therefore the earliest opportunity the relevant approvals could be sought from Council, in order that the required statutory stages can be met.

As set out above, significant progress has been made in scoping the local plan and the evidence gathering, overseen by the Officer Working Group.

- **What is the status of and what consultation has occurred on the conservation area appraisals**

The Council has eleven conservation areas across the Borough and work commenced on reviewing those conservation areas through conservation area appraisals in 2024.

At this current time, nine of the conservation area appraisals have been completed.

Due to planned works within Yarm and Stockton town centres, a decision was made to leave those appraisals until last, however, the Yarm Conservation Area Appraisal is nearly complete and work will then begin on the Stockton Conservation Area Appraisal later this year.

A quick review will be undertaken of those conservation area appraisals produced earlier on, with a consultation on those taking place as a whole, in due course.

- **Paragraph 31 – should committee read council**

This was a typing error and has been corrected for the June 2026 report

- **Members working group and Terms of reference**

The decision to create a Member Working Group must be taken by Council and it was appropriate to seek approval to create the group at the same meeting where approval was sought to formally commence the process under the new regulations.

The terms of reference enclosed within the report are draft and it will be for the Members Working Group to comment and agree on at the first meeting. They were drafted to assist Members in gaining an understanding into the broad purpose of the group.

Reference to the Chair being from the administrative party was simply a reflection, by officers, of the previous arrangements within earlier versions of the Members Working Group and it will be for the group to collectively decide upon the Chair.

Legal advice has been sought regarding Membership of the group and there is nothing to legally prevent Members of Planning Committee from sitting on the Members working group. Consideration will need to be given by any Member sitting on either or both groups to manage any potential conflicts of interest.

Whilst Members of the Working Group will be encouraged to share updates across their political groups, in some cases there will be the potential for sensitive information to be shared. Members will need to act appropriately to ensure confidential information is not shared.

- **Delegations referenced at para 36, are they the same as the report or additional**

Additional delegations will be required, in order to meet with the 30 month timeframe for producing a new Local Plan. However, at this stage all the associated approvals and delegations within the report allow Officers to progress matters through the 'getting ready' stage only.

A further report to Council will follow in early 2027, which will seek Authorisation to enter 'Gateway 1' and seek further delegations to begin the plan making process.

As Members will be aware with the Boroughs Local Elections taking place next May, there is also the need to factor in the pre-election period within those timescales to ensure that the statutory backstop dates can be achieved.

For clarity, Officers intend to undertake a phased approach to securing delegations to progress the plan making process, ensuring that Council has oversight at the relevant stages.

- **Save Yarm Petition**

Officers are aware of the 'Save Yarm' petition and it has been discussed at the Officers Local Plan Working group. The petition will be taken to the Member Working Group, if agreed to be established, as agreed at Council.

Although matters raised within the Yarm Housing petition are noted, potential land allocations and policy designations across the Borough (including housing) would fall into Gateways 1 and 2 of the Local Plan process.

As detailed within the report, what is being sought at this stage is approval to undertake the various steps as part of the 'getting ready' stage, ahead of entering 'Gateway 1' early in the new year.