

## ITEM 6

### Local Plan Engagement Strategy

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#### Purpose

The emerging communication and engagement strategy for the new local plan (Annex 1) sets out our proposed approach to engaging stakeholders and the wider public in the development of the plan.

The Local Plan Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) is asked to:

- a) Provide comments on the emerging strategy; and
- b) Provide comments on the key considerations and suggested approach.

#### Background

We are at the early stage of preparing a new local plan for Milton Keynes.

We want engagement for the plan to be meaningful and in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (June 2020). This Statement sets out guiding principles for community involvement and reflects the statutory regulations for local plan consultations. However, the engagement strategy for Milton Keynes' new local plan is intended to be more wide-ranging than statutory consultations.

Whilst consultation on pre-written proposals will still happen, broader ongoing communications should be inclusive, accessible, relevant, memorable, and should make the plan easy to find and easy to give feedback on.

The process of preparing a local plan is lengthy and often technical so it's not always easy to engage in the process, particularly if you have little experience of the planning system. One of the key themes is to 'demystify' the process by using clear, concise language and material.

## Engaging a wider audience

Increased community engagement, particularly in local plans, is one of the government's key priorities. The planning white paper 'Planning for the Future' (August 2020) recognises the challenges and opportunities relating to engagement:

"It is difficult for users of the planning system to find the information they need, and when they do, it is difficult to understand. Few people read the array of evidence base documents which accompany plans..."

"Local councils should radically and profoundly re-invent the ambition, depth and breadth with which they engage with communities as they consult on Local Plans."

"Digital tools (should) make it easier for people to understand what is being proposed and its likely impact on them through visualisations and other digital approaches... feed their views into the system through social networks and via phones."

We will seek creative methods and targeted on and offline channels to engage, consult, and communicate with as many groups as possible who would be affected by or have an interest in the local plan, including people who may not have engaged in local planning in the past.

## Key considerations

### 1. Engagement beyond the statutory minimum

The engagement strategy for Milton Keynes' new local plan is intended to be more wide-ranging than statutory consultations, which has implications for budget, resource, and timing. Specialist resources (such as agency support, digital planning tools) would be required to help deliver the programme and will require a procurement exercise. *CAG is invited to comment on the preferred ambition of engagement, recognising that further opportunity will be given to review specific costs, methods and timing.*

### 2. Local plan engagement – launch with introduction or technical exercise?

Usual practice is to start engagement with a general 'Introduction to the Plan'. However, as set out in section 6 of Annex 1, our first large-scale engagement activity relates to the 'Call for Sites'. This is a technical evidence gathering exercise that must occur early on as several evidence studies are dependent on its outputs. *CAG is invited to consider whether the programme should start with the Call for Sites, recognising that a wider public launch will follow.*

## Next steps

- Revise the plan in light of feedback from CAG.
- Carry out stakeholder mapping, detailed planning, and cost analysis for each stage.
- Consider including the engagement strategy as an annex to the Local Development Scheme (LDS) when it is next reviewed.

# Annex 1: Draft Milton Keynes Local Plan Engagement Strategy

## 1. Communication Objectives

- a) Stakeholders and the wider public to be **aware of the local plan** from the earliest stages; know how to get involved, where to find the latest information, and how to **make their views known** easily. Imaginative and compelling PR activities to be used to draw attention to the plan.
- b) The local plan and its engagement process should be **trusted**, which means communications should be clear, brief, timely, and accessible. Technical matters should be jargon free where possible. Planning processes to be demystified.
- c) **Many voices should be heard**, including people who haven't engaged in planning in the past, by using personalised methods and channels (audiences to be asked for their preferred methods). Giving feedback should be straightforward and intuitive. Communications to be evaluated throughout for impact and adjusted where needed.

## 2. Engagement Milestones

Subject to formal agreement by the Council and engagement with the CAG.

**2021-22 Listen and learn (inform, consult, collaborate)**

Call for sites (2021-22) Open invitation for anyone to put sites forward to be considered for allocation for a range of uses and purposes (housing, economic, energy, community, green infrastructure, waste, etc) accompanied by land availability assessment methodology.

Introduction to the plan (2022) What it is and what it isn't; what planning reforms may mean for the plan; connection to MK2050 Strategy. Opportunity for feedback on the engagement plan itself.

Engagement on individual evidence studies (2022)

**2023 Emerging thinking (inform, consult)**

Engagement and consultation on draft plan

**2023-24 Making choices (inform, consult, collaborate)**

Responding to 2023 consultation, further evidence gathering, making changes to the plan as a result of feedback.

**2024-25 Final draft plan (inform, consult)**

Consultation on proposed submission plan, examination process engagement.

**2025 Implementing and monitoring (inform)**

Post adoption engagement

### 3. Audience/Stakeholder Categories

As part of the plan development, specific stakeholders will be identified, and all groups will be mapped to understand preferred communications methods and requirements.

Some of these groups eg councillors, parish councils have a role outside their own consultation to help us engage directly with residents and facilitate engagement.

- Planning CAG
- MKC Councillors
- MKC Employees
- Parish/Town Councils
- Residents
- Businesses and their Employees
- Community Groups

- Landowners/Developers/Agents
- Other Stakeholders
- Groups that would not normally engage
- Duty to co-operate bodies and other local planning authorities

### 4. Key Themes

Specific messages will be identified in the stakeholder mapping stage.

Much of the context for the new Local Plan is already set out in the **MK Futures 2050 Strategy** and its **seven big ambitions**:

- Strengthen those qualities that make Milton Keynes special
- Make Milton Keynes a leading green and cultural city – by global standards
- Ensure everyone has their own decent home to rent or buy
- Build safe communities that support health and wellbeing
- Provide jobs for everyone by supporting businesses, and attracting new ones
- Offer better opportunities for everyone to learn and develop their skills
- Make it easier for everyone to travel on foot, by bike and with better public transport

**The engagement material will explain the following:**

- Why do we need a local plan?
- What will the local plan do?
- How is a local plan prepared and how long will it take?
- How can I have my say?
- What about Neighbourhood Plans?

**5. Potential Channels**

Channels are to be identified during the stakeholder mapping exercise, but include:

<b>Paid</b>	<b>Earned</b>	<b>Owned</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising</li> <li>• Dedicated digital microsite with tools such as interactive mapping</li> <li>• Posters and flyers</li> <li>• Animations</li> <li>• PR stunts and partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media releases and briefings</li> <li>• Community panel involvement</li> <li>• Partners and stakeholders engaging their audiences</li> <li>• Community events and competitions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council website</li> <li>• Council e-alerts and newsletters</li> <li>• Council social – posts, virtual events</li> <li>• Internal events</li> <li>• Video production</li> <li>• Direct engagement with schools and other groups</li> </ul>

**6. Communications Risks and Mitigations**

<b>Communications Risks</b>	<b>Mitigations</b>
Compliance with statutory requirements, SCI and corporate standards	Ensure relevant Regulations, corporate standards and SCI requirements and recommendations are considered early and fully met at each stage
Financial / resource – programme will take time and resource to implement successfully. Some elements require external suppliers (cost and commissioning time to be factored in)	Realistic budget plus contingency for each stage of engagement. Realistic programming including time to analyse comments and make changes as a result. Training and support from procurement team to ensure standards are met.
Operational – changing planning system may mean that engagement must be adjusted as we go through the process	Ensure that engagement programme is adaptable and that we can quickly and effectively communicate any changes via our established methods. Ensure officers keep up to date with emerging policy.
Reputational a) not reaching wider audience b) consultation fatigue/frustration about what can and can't be influenced	a) Researched and targeted channels and messages, evaluated during delivery and adjusted as needed. b) Clear messaging on the role of the local plan, what it can and can't do, what can be influenced and why engagement is valued.