



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 12th May, 2025

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Matthew Dormer (Chair), Councillor Craig Warhurst (Vice-Chair) and Councillors William Boyd, Andrew Fry, Sachin Mathur, David Munro, Rita Rogers and Paul Wren

Also Present:

Councillor Sharon Harvey – Deputy Leader of the Council

Officers:

Guy Revans, Rachel Egan, Neil Batt and Mike Dunphy

Democratic Services Officers:

M Sliwinski

92. APOLOGIES AND NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kane.

93. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest nor of party whip.

94. MINUTES

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10th March 2025 were submitted for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 10th March 2025 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

95. PUBLIC SPEAKING

Chair

There were no public speakers who had registered to speak at this meeting.

96. REDDITCH LOCAL PLAN - PRE-SCRUTINY

The report on Redditch Local Plan Issues and Options Consultation was presented. It was remarked that the Issues and Options Consultation would be the first stage in the development of the new Redditch Local Plan and, if endorsed by full Council, would be released for a six-week public consultation period. The Issues and Options Consultation followed the Local Development Scheme (LDS) which had set out the timeline for Local Plan development.

The purpose of the Issues and Options consultation was to consult the public, statutory consultees and a range of stakeholders on what the new Local Plan should contain. This consultation was less detailed than future consultations to be held through the plan-making process (such as a 'Preferred Option' consultation) and as such the Council had some discretion over the format of this consultation. It was commented that the consultation document at Appendix A was designed by officers so that it was concise and clear to understand but contained all the necessary information.

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager provided an overview of the sections contained within the Issues and Options consultation document. Sections 1-3 provided background information on the Borough and the Local Plan process, section 4 detailed the reasons why the Local Plan review was required and what the process would be for its development. Section 6 contained the details of the 'call for sites' exercise which enabled developers and landowners to submit potential development sites which they wished to be considered for inclusion in the Local Plan review.

Sections 7 and 9-15 contained consultation questions. Section 7 covered the design coding which defined requirements for the physical development of the area. The detailed design code would be produced later in the Local Plan period and would be informed by the responses from this Issues and Options consultation. Section 9 looked at the key issues identified for Redditch Borough based on evidence base documents such as the Sustainability Appraisal scoping report, the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) and conversations held with elected members including through Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) meetings.

Section 10 covered the possible growth options, looking at possible broad locations for development based on the characteristics of Redditch Borough. It was noted that the growth strategy would be informed by what sites were available for development, the suitability of potential sites submitted through the Call for Sites exercise and on what the evidence suggested were the locations most sustainable for new development. The government-set house building target would also need to be considered which for Redditch Borough was now 485 new houses per year.

It was highlighted that among the changes in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was the introduction of 'grey belt', defined as 'land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land.' This had potential implications in that some land in Redditch, which was currently protected by the Green Belt or in countryside, could be considered for development.

The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager reported that for this consultation, the Council would be using an online consultation platform called

'Commonplace', which allowed consultees to choose the sections of the consultation document they wished to fill out and which had features such as 'map pin' which would enable consultees to drop a pin in the digital map to provide location detail for any issued referred to in the responses.

It was commented that the use of a consultation platform should make it easier to engage with 'harder-to-reach' groups such as young people. Paper copies of the consultation document would also be available in the Council's temporary customer services centre, libraries and other locations throughout the Borough, and both email and paper responses to the consultation would also be accepted.

The following questions and comments were raised by Members during the discussion of this item:

- Grey Belt – It was clarified that the Grey Belt was defined as land within the Green Belt comprising previously developed land or as land located within the Green Belt that did not strongly contribute to the main purposes of the Green Belt designation. It was explained that at the moment it was uncertain how Grey Belt would need to be considered by planners. Within the Redditch's Issues and Options

Consultation, developing on 'grey belt' was considered under option 2 in section 10.

- Assessment of suitable sites for the Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show-People Community – It was explained that this would be determined through this consultation process, including the assessment of need for this Community. A Member questioned the classification of travelling show-people under the above category. In response it was explained that classification of communities was determined based on legal definitions but this would also be reviewed based on feedback from these communities on how they identified themselves.
- Areas available for development within Redditch – A Member commented that there were opportunities to redevelop some areas within Redditch, such as Auxerre House or parts of Salters Lane. An example was cited of Auxerre House which was an extensive four-storey building that could be demolished and/or redeveloped to provide high quality urban housing. It was noted that the consultees would have the option to prioritise this type of 'urban renewal' development under option 1 of section 10 within the Issues and Options Consultation.
- Option for Members to attend meetings of the Planning Advisory Panel (PAP) remotely – The Officer confirmed he would find out whether remote attendance at future meetings of PAP could be accommodated (as hybrid meetings), or whether some meetings of PAP could be held entirely online.
- Actual numbers of houses built in Redditch versus central government annual house building targets – A Member requested information on the actual numbers of houses built in Redditch over the last few years and whether these numbers met central government targets for those years. The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager undertook to provide Members with this data.
- Housing mix in the new Local Plan – A Member commented that building a greater proportion of higher council tax band housing would be beneficial in terms of council tax income; however, it was noted that from planning perspective council tax return was not a material consideration and could not be considered in the development of the Local Plan. Members also commented that housing mix needed to be the right type

for Redditch demographic, including young people who were entering the housing market and elderly residents.

- Mix of sites for development – An observation was made that utilising a limited number of large sites would likely lead to slower rates of house building as opposed to choosing a number of sites spread across the Borough. It was commented that the expediting of house building would not necessarily be enforceable through the Local Plan but would require parliamentary legislation.
- It was highlighted that with the high house building targets there would need to be associated infrastructure and employment provided. It was noted that the employment numbers per area would be a metric set down by central government with the Council not having much option to adjust these figures.
- Promotion of the Issues and Options Consultation – The Strategic Planning and Conservation Manager stated that the consultation would be advertised in the local papers and through a social media campaign. The consultation platform, 'Commonplace', would enable officers to see live response rates by postcode area, and focus groups could be organised over and above this 6-week consultation period. It was noted that a further email would be sent to all Councillors before the consultation launch, containing a link to the consultation document. Councillors could forward this email to residents to encourage responses.
- Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the district/borough level Local Plans – A question was asked on the implications of LGR proposal to create unitary authorities in the existing two-tier local government areas and how this would impact the individual Local Plans created by the borough / district councils within the proposed unitary areas. It was responded that it was currently unknown how this issue would be resolved, for example if all plans would be amalgamated within a unitary local plan or whether existing local administrative geographies would continue to apply within the unitary area.
- Consideration of design costs and building regulations – It was noted by the officer that whether the Local Plan would require new builds to simply comply with the design and building regulations or enforce additional requirements above

and beyond those regulations was not a straightforward issue to answer at the moment and would depend among other things on consultation responses received from within the building and design industry.

On being put to the vote, the recommendations as set out in the report were endorsed.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1) The Council endorses Redditch Local Plan Issues and Options consultation document (Appendix A) for a six-week public consultation period.**
- 2) Delegated authority is given to the Assistant Director for Planning, Leisure and Culture Services following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Regeneration and Governance to make any minor technical corrections and editorial changes deemed necessary to aid the understanding of the documentation prior to final publishing.**

97. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES AND SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S WORK PROGRAMME - SELECTING ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

The following items from the latest Executive Work Programme (1st June to 30th September 2025) were added to the Overview and Scrutiny work programme (as pre-scrutiny items):

- Disposal of Housing Revenue Account Assets – 53 Parsons Road, Southcrest, Redditch. 53 Crabbs Cross Lane, Crabbs Cross, Redditch (9th June)
- Disposal of Housing Revenue Account Assets – Four garages at Ashorne Close, Matchborough, Redditch (9th June)
- Regulator of Social Housing Inspection Report and Housing Improvement Plan (1st September)

The above reports would be added to the items already selected for pre-scrutiny at the 9th June and 1st September meetings, as detailed in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

The Executive Director confirmed that the Regulator of Social Housing would release the inspection report on 20th July, and thus

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the Housing Improvement Plan and the Regulator's Inspection report would be considered at September Committee meetings.

RESOLVED that

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated with items from the Executive Committee's Work Programme as per the pre-ambles above.

98. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED that

the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme be updated with items from the latest Executive Work Programme, as agreed (at Minute No. 97).

99. TASK GROUPS, SHORT SHARP REVIEWS AND WORKING GROUPS - UPDATE REPORTS

Updates on the ongoing Task Groups and Working Groups were provided as follows:

- a) Budget Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

There were no further meetings of Budget Scrutiny since the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny on 10th March.

- b) Performance Scrutiny Working Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

There were no further meetings of Performance Scrutiny since the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny on 10th March.

- c) Fly Tipping and Bulky Waste Task Group – Chair, Councillor Dormer

It was confirmed that this Task Group had now been concluded and the final report would be submitted to the next meeting of Overview and Scrutiny.

- d) Post-16 Education Task Group – Chair, Councillor Warhurst

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Councillor Warhurst reported that a further meeting of the Task Group was necessary before recommendations could be made and the Task Group finalised.

RESOLVED that

the Task Groups, Short Sharp Reviews and Working Groups Update Reports be noted.

100. EXTERNAL SCRUTINY BODIES - UPDATE REPORTS

Update on the meetings of External Scrutiny Bodies were provided by the representatives as follows:

- a) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Council Representative, Councillor Kane

There was no update provided as Councillor Kane had submitted apologies.

- b) West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny – Council Representative, Councillor Munro

Councillor Munro reported that the last meeting of WMCA Transport Delivery Overview and Scrutiny was held on 10th March 2025. At the meeting, Midland Rail Hub update was discussed, which had some details of relevance concerning the long-term delivery of rail services in Redditch.

Councillor Munro reported that redevelopment of the Birmingham Snow Hill station to add extra platforms would be a significant problem as the station was built below ground level. The Kings Norton to Barnt Green line would become 4-track, with electrification of fast lines and additional Kings Norton platforms. There were also plans to increase the volume of rail services going to and from Redditch station to Birmingham, however, it was highlighted that the business case for these Midland Rail Hub proposals would only be submitted in 2028.

With reference to the Redditch railway station, it was noted that before the covid pandemic there were three trains per hour operating from the station which had dropped to two services per hour following the covid pandemic.

- c) Worcestershire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) – Council Representative, Council Munro

Councillor Munro reported that the last meeting of HOSC took place on 17th March 2025. At this meeting, the main item of relevance was the options for redesign of adult mental health rehabilitation services. All three options discussed at the meeting involved conversion of the now closed Hill Crest mental health unit to a level two rehabilitation unit, to provide local mental health rehabilitation services. Councillor Munro expressed hope that the unit would be truly local to Redditch residents, rather than a regional (i.e. all Worcestershire/Hertfordshire) centre for mental health rehabilitation services.

RESOLVED that

the External Scrutiny Bodies updates be noted.

101. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

It was agreed that exclusion of the public and press was not necessary in relation to Minute Item 102. DMIC (Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre) Additional Design Costs (AHR Architects Contract Variation) – Pre-Scrutiny, as the contents of the exempt appendix to the report would not be discussed in the meeting. The meeting remained in public session for its entire duration.

102. DMIC (DIGITAL MANUFACTURING AND INNOVATION CENTRE) ADDITIONAL DESIGN COSTS (AHR ARCHITECTS CONTRACT VARIATION) - PRE-SCRUTINY

The Regeneration Manager presented the report and provided background information to the report proposals. It was recapped that following a change in administration in 2024, decision had been taken by the Council to cancel the redevelopment of Redditch Library site, which initially left an underspend on the Town Investment Plan of £4.2 million.

In Autumn 2024, the Council's newly appointed regeneration team reviewed the business model for the Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC) – one of the projects comprising the Town Investment Plan – and identified potential to expand the development and increase the project's financial viability by utilising the underspend from the cancelled library project.

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A decision was subsequently taken by the Town Deal Board to expand the development and increase the amount of net lettable floorspace in the DMIC. A Project Adjustment Request (PAR) was submitted and signed off by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to utilise the £4.2 million library underspend of which £3.937 million could be allocated to the DMIC project. It was noted that the Council's request for extended timescales for spending the Government's Town Deal funding had also been agreed by the MHCLG, which allowed the Council until the end of March 2027 to spend this funding.

It was explained that this report recommended the sign off of the additional design and project management costs associated with the expanded development, which would increase the amount of net lettable space and make the DCIM more sustainable with expanded benefits. The report asked for approval of allocating additional design cost up to a maximum of £1.45 million. It was clarified that this figure would include any contingency sums built into areas such as construction estimates. The report also asked for allocation of additional project management services costs up to a maximum of £250,000, including contingency costs.

It was explained that a further report would be brought forward for Members' consideration once designs were costed out and prior to appointment of a construction contractor. It was highlighted that all the funding utilised within the DMIC development was external funding, with no input from the Council's revenue or reserves.

Following officer presentation, a Member asked for detail regarding the increase in floor and net lettable space resulting from expanding the project. In response, it was stated that the expanded DMIC would be designed to have a gross floor area of 2600m² as opposed to 1900m² in the original project proposal. The net lettable space of the DCIM would also increase significantly as a result of expanding the development, to 17,000 ft².

In response to a question, it was explained that the maximum £1.45 million design team costs factored in possible contingency costs that could arise.

The Committee was reassured that the Towns Deal programme was on track to have all the MHCLG funding fully utilised by the deadline of March 2027. It was stated that there was no comparable deadline for the Council to spend the funding that was within the now defunct Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Funding (GBSLEP), in relation to the Council's funding

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within GBSLEP, it was explained that a bid would be submitted by June 2025 to recover this funding. It was reported by Officers that Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) had now recovered the funding it had in the GBSLEP funding 'pool' and Redditch Borough Council would be following a similar process to recover the funds that it had within GBSLEP.

In concluding this item, a Member commented on the impressive turnaround and positive prospects of the DMIC project.

On being put to the vote, the recommendations as set out in the report were endorsed.

RECOMMENDED to Executive Committee that:

- 1) AHR Architects design team costs are increased up to a maximum of £1,450,000 for design of Redditch Digital Manufacturing and Innovation Centre (DMIC).**
- 2) Costs for Gardiner and Theobald (G&T) project management services for the DMIC are increased up to a maximum of £250,000.**

RECOMMENDED that the Executive Committee NOTE:

- 3) Any draw down of contingency is subject to approval by the Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer) in conjunction with the Assistant Director for Regeneration and Property.**
- 4) That the additional funding at recommendations 1 and 2 above utilises reallocated central government grant monies.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm
and closed at 7.32 pm