

On Wednesday 16 September, Rochford District Council's [planning policy committee](#) considered the draft 'Regulation 19' Local Plan and its supporting documents. The plan will now go before an Extraordinary Council meeting on 23 September, with a recommendation that it be approved for a six-week consultation.

At the meeting, attended by members of the public and local community groups alongside councillors, a number of questions and concerns were raised, including about specific sites allocated within the draft. Before the meeting on 23 September, a reference group of councillors working closely on the Local Plan will undertake further review of the proposed site allocations, the outcome of which will be reported to the Extraordinary Council meeting.

The committee approved the council's plan for getting as many residents as possible involved in the consultation, but agreed that it should go even further. In addition to the proposed campaign which includes print and digital advertising, social media campaign, webinar and drop-in sessions, the strengthened approach will include additional face-to-face events and targeted communications for the communities most affected by growth.

Should Extraordinary Council give the green light to the consultation, there will be evening drop-ins to ensure residents who work or volunteer can attend, and practical guidance will be offered on how to make consultation comments that address the legal tests the plan must pass.

Local Plans set out where new homes, jobs and infrastructure can and cannot go over the next 15 to 20 years. Without an up-to-date plan in place, councils have far less control over where development happens, are more purely bound by national legislation, and are more exposed to speculative planning applications that bypass local wishes altogether.

The view of the Chair:

Councillor Neil Hookway, Chair of the Planning Policy Committee, said, "A Local Plan is one of the most important, impactful things a Council can do. In the Council Chamber last night, numerous members of the public and councillors both on the committee and more widely raised concerns about specific site allocations. They also asked about the inclusion of more brownfield sites. It's important that we carefully consider these, given the enormity of the impacts our recommendations will make as part of the Local Plan process.

"The committee as a whole recognises the hard work and effort put in by officers: however, it was evident that members felt more work was required. It cannot be said that the Planning Policy Committee and all the political group members within it have not put the effort in to see this process to a conclusion. This is despite the ridiculous limitations and timescales placed on us to meet central government deadlines."

So what's next?

This week's meeting saw robust debate about individual site allocations, reflecting how much the district's people care about their communities. That discussion will continue through the reference group and Extraordinary Council meetings. The proposed six-week consultation in autumn will have a specific purpose: to ask residents, businesses and other interested parties whether the plan is legally compliant and sound. That is the question that the Government requires all councils to ask at this stage, before the plan is submitted for inspection.
