

Committee

Report of Head of Planning

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To: The Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 11 February 2014

REPORT NO:

Science Vale Area Action Plan

Recommendation(s)

(a) To consider this report and the draft Issues and Scope Consultation document, and make any recommendations of changes to the Cabinet Member.

Purpose of Report

1. To share the draft Science Vale Area Action Plan Issues and Scope Consultation document for Scrutiny to provide comment ahead of the Cabinet Member decision to launch an Issues and Scope Regulation 18 planning consultation.

Strategic Objectives

2. The area action plan will support the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 in achieving the following strategic objectives in the 2012-2016 Corporate Plan:
 - meeting housing need
 - building the local economy.
3. The public consultation that we plan to carry out on the emerging area action plan in accordance with our Statement of Community Involvement is part of how the council meets the following corporate objectives:
 - positive and constructive work with community groups
 - communities involved in decisions about development and other things affecting their local area.

Background

4. Science Vale is home to the highest concentration of multi-million pound research and development activity in Western Europe, and one of the most successful science clusters in the UK. Given the significant amount of change taking place in Science Vale, Vale of White Horse District Council have outlined a commitment in their published Local Plan 2031 Part 1 to produce an area action plan, which would cover part of the Vale, and in addition part of South Oxfordshire. This would support the implementation of the local plan and help in delivery of the allocated strategic sites to a high quality. South Oxfordshire have a similar commitment to produce an area action plan in their adopted local plan core strategy. The area action plan will be a positive planning tool that will help shape, coordinate and deliver sustainable growth across the area.
5. As identified in our published Local Development Scheme we are seeking to launch an Issue and Scope Consultation to formally begin the plan making process. This is required by Regulation 18 of the planning regulations. We will be consulting on what issues Science Vale is facing, and what the area action plan can cover to address these. A proposed boundary for the plan will also be set out for comment, as will a draft vision and objectives.
6. This is a very early stage of the plan making process and the draft document does not seek to make any decisions and does not contain any draft policies. The committee will also be able to feedback as part of the consultation and engage with the plan making process that will be subject to a number of other consultations as the process moves forward.
7. We aim to launch the consultation on 27 February 2015, which will run for seven weeks. The decision to undertake a consultation will be subject to a Cabinet Member decision but ahead of this we would welcome any feedback from the Scrutiny Committee on the draft document. We also propose to hold an all councillor briefing in the week commencing 23 February to discuss the plan ahead of the formal consultation.
8. Planning policy officers have worked with our communications and other specialist officers within corporate strategy to develop the scope and details of the proposed consultation material. The consultation will be open to all residents in the district but the consultation events will be focussed at locations within Science Vale. A mixture of consultation methods will be used including exhibitions and evening meetings. The consultation will be advertised in a variety of ways in accordance with our Statement of Community Involvement. We will use press releases to local media, the council's social media pages and website, Science Vale parish newsletters and leave copies of the document in key deposit points like libraries.

Financial Implications

9. The area action plan seeks to assist in the implementation of the development proposed in the emerging local plan. This could help in securing New Homes Bonus, subject to the lifespan and continuation of this scheme.
10. A Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule is being prepared in parallel to the local plan, and once both are adopted this will generate receipts for infrastructure funding.

11. The work associated with developing the area action plan, including this consultation has been budgeted for as part of the planning policy budget.

Legal Implications

12. The area action plan will form part of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan. It is a legal requirement for local planning authorities to produce a local plan and keep it up to date. Once adopted both documents would replace (except for saved policies) the Local Plan 2011 as the basis for development management decision-making in the district.
13. The duty to cooperate on cross-boundary matters relevant to plan-making is a legal test that must be passed before a plan can proceed to examination. The area action plan will support the local plan in demonstrating cooperation with South Oxfordshire in this cross boundary area. Early consultation on the area action plan is important to ensure the requirements of the duty cooperate.

Risks

14. A key risk relates to the timescales associated with delivering the consultation ahead of the forthcoming election. If Scrutiny Committee enact their call-in period associated with the Cabinet Member decision it will result in the consultation being delayed until after the forthcoming elections. This would have implications for the delivery of the plan to the timescales agreed in our Local Development Scheme, and its ability to influence early applications within the Science Vale area- e.g. Valley Park.
15. To minimise this risk we would appreciate any comments to be raised on the draft document ahead of the Cabinet Member decision so the consultation can go ahead as planned for in the Local Development Scheme.

Conclusion

16. Scrutiny committee is requested to consider this report and the draft Issues and Scope Consultation document, and to make any recommendations of changes to the Cabinet Member prior to his decision.

Background Papers

- Draft Science Vale Area Action Plan: Issues and Scope Consultation document