



Leader of Basildon Council

Cllr Andrew Baggott

12 January 2024

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State, Rt Hon Michel Gove, MP,

s.15 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 intervention in the Basildon Borough Council Local Plan

Thank you for your letter of 19 December 2023 regarding the above matter.

Basildon Borough Council acknowledges that, following the withdrawal of the last emerging plan in March 2022, the Council does not have an emerging plan under the current planning system. However, the Council subsequently agreed an Local Development Scheme (LDS) timetable in November 2022, and officers have continued to liaise regularly with your officials over the last two years on the Council's progress in relation to the production of its new local plan.

The Council does not consider that it will be possible to submit a new Local Plan by your 30 June 2025 deadline nor should the Government intervene in an established process for developing local plans. If officials from the Department know of an alternative process then we would be happy to follow it.

As a local planning authority, the Council is acutely aware of the need to bring forward a properly evidenced and legally compliant draft plan as soon as practically possible and has made several public commitments to do this. Since the withdrawal of the last emerging Local Plan in March 2022, the Council has had to bring forward a new Local Plan supported by a substantially new evidence base. The evidence base that supported the withdrawn plan is now largely out of date, and fundamental revisions are required. This has been communicated to DLUHC officers on a number of occasions.

Hence since the withdrawal of the local plan in March 2022 we have:

- Prepared a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) which has been approved by Full Council.
- Prepared a Regulation 18: Issues and Options consultation documents within the timeframe set out in the LDS (Q2 2023).
- Held a 12-week Regulation 18: Issues and Options Consultation, which commenced within the timeframe set out in the LDS (Q2 2023).
- Completed analysis of the Regulation 18: Issues and Options Consultation. This will be scrutinised by committee on 1 February 2024 and reviewed by Cabinet on 12 March 2024.

Email: leader@basildon.gov.uk

Telephone: 07905761372

Facebook: [LeaderBasildonCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/LeaderBasildonCouncil)



- Held a 'Call for sites' and are currently interrogating the methodology for site selection.
- Commenced the preparation of a new evidence base including retail and leisure needs, employment land, green belt review, playing pitch and facilities strategy, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, Settlement Hierarchy, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Urban Capacity Study, Climate change and Biodiversity issues. These are all ongoing projects and are expected to be completed by Autumn 2024.
- Commissioned an Integrated Impact Assessment, comprising Sustainability Appraisal and incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- Held regular joint working meetings with Essex planning officers (EPOA), JOG (South Essex officers which is part of South Essex Councils) and Duty to Cooperate (quarterly) with neighbouring authorities which are all supported by meeting notes / minutes.
- Encouraged local community discussions including implementing a new digital approach to engagement and held public meetings.

Our LDS provides a sensible and achievable timeline which takes full account of the comprehensive statutory consultation requirements, as well as the need for sufficient and detailed consideration of reasonable spatial alternatives. This is critical giving the impact on the green belt to deliver housing, employment and other development needs.

We have set out that the Council will commence a Regulation 18: Draft Local Plan consultation by end September 2024 which is already an ambitious timeframe given the work that is required to achieve this. The LDS also sets out that we will prepare a Publication Local Plan and commence a Regulation 19 Consultation by end December 2025. Again, communicated to DLUHC on a number of occasions.

This will require multiple pieces of further work including but not limited to:

- Viability assessments.
- Preparation of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- Robust review of all urban capacity to accommodate growth.
- A completed green belt review.
- Consideration of exceptional circumstances that are fully evidenced and justified to review our Green Belt boundaries in order to cater for the borough's development needs, particularly housing, that cannot be met by non-green belt allocations alone.
- Consideration of our spatial development options. This process must involve both consultation and close working with neighbouring authorities given the cross-boundary implications of the spatial strategies likely to be available to the borough.

The Council is therefore at a relatively early stage of plan preparation, and intervention is not necessary to enable further progress and achieve these outcomes.

In addition and with consultation by your officials, the Council has already engaged with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to discuss refinement of the LDS and to explore whether it is possible to bring forward some of its key dates. The Council is keen to continue to work closely with the Department to demonstrate the Council's commitment and progress towards achieving the key stages in the local plan process.

Following receipt of your letter, Council officers met with DLUHC officers on 9 January 2024 and a further meeting has been scheduled for mid-February. This follows on from the regular meetings over the past two years since the withdrawal of the previous plan. The Council consider that working with PAS will further allow the LDS to be robustly scrutinised and will help to identify any potential areas for acceleration of the programme.

The Council has read your letter and reviewed its position in the short timescale given. It has always been our intention to deliver a new local plan with a sensible and achievable timeframe. As such the suggested intervention is clearly not appropriate or welcome given the considerations set out above. We look forward to continuing to work with your colleagues and I can assure you that a new local plan will be submitted by Quarter 2 of 2026 as set out within the current LDS.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Andrew Baggott
Leader of Basildon Council