

## **THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 17 March 2026**

Attendance:

Councillors  
Brook (Chairperson)

Wallace  
Clear  
Power

Murphy  
Bolton

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors Batho, Laming and Pett

Deputy Members:

Councillor Gordon-Smith (as deputy for Laming)

Other members in attendance:

Councillor(s) Horrill, Lee, Porter, Cramoysan and Tod

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

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1. **APOLOGIES AND DEPUTY MEMBERS**

Apologies for the meeting were noted as above.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

Councillor Wallace declared a disclosable pecuniary interest due to his role as a Hampshire County Councillor. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, he remained in the room and spoke under the dispensation granted by the Audit and Governance committee.

Councillors Tod and Porter advised that whilst they were not members of the committee, they wished to advise that they were both members of Hampshire County Council and held a dispensation granted by the Audit & Governance Committee in relation to that role.

3. **CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

No announcements were made.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE 4 MARCH 2026 (TO FOLLOW)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 4 March 2026 be approved and adopted.

5. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Councillor Caroline Horrill and Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee regarding item 6, Adoption of the Winchester District Local Plan 2040 and the Preparation of the Local Plan 2044 and a summary of their contributions were captured within the agenda item below.

6. **ADOPTION OF THE WINCHESTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN 2040 AND THE PREPARATION OF THE LOCAL PLAN 2044**

Councillor Caroline Brook, Chairperson of the Committee, provided an introduction concerning the scope of discussion which included the following:

1. The local plan had completed its independent examination by a government-appointed planning inspector and was found sound, subject to a number of main and additional modifications.
2. The council faced a limited legal choice to either adopt the plan exactly as modified or choose not to adopt it. Amending policy content, site allocations, settlement boundaries, or housing numbers was not possible at this stage.
3. Adopting the local plan remained a major corporate decision that determined development locations, influenced infrastructure provision, affected environmental outcomes, and shaped exposure to planning appeals.
4. The committee's role was to provide assurance and accountability by considering whether a robust and transparent process was followed since the Regulation 19 stage, and whether the council fully understood the implications of adopting or not adopting the plan.

Councillor Jackie Porter, Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan introduced the report, ref CL177 which set out proposals for the Winchester District Local Plan 2040 and the Preparation of the Local Plan 2044, ([available here](#)). The introduction included the following points.

1. The local plan protected the district's unique natural and historic assets from damaging development and would play a key role in the council's aspiration to be a carbon-neutral district by 2030.
2. The report contained two parts: the adoption of the local plan to 2040, and the agreement to commence preparation for the next local plan to 2044.
3. Further minor corrections to the report were noted. These included updating recommendation 2 to reflect that the Full Council meeting is now scheduled for 24 March 2026, and amending paragraph 1.3 to remove the phrase 'and prioritises brownfield sites over greenfield land,' in line with the Inspector's recommendations.
4. The preparation for the 2044 plan would require a significant amount of work within a compressed 30-month timeframe.

Councillor Caroline Horrill addressed the committee as summarised briefly as follows. She asked how the process would work for the new 2044 plan given the much shorter 30-month timeframe. She inquired about how the council proposed anticipating changes from the recent National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation in the scoping of the next plan. Furthermore, she sought clarification on the future status of the existing supplementary planning documents (SPDs) and Village Design Statements (VDS), and whether the planning department would continue to support similar community-led documents going forward.

Councillor Danny Lee addressed the committee as summarised briefly as follows. He raised questions regarding the likelihood of a Judicial Review challenge to the 2040 plan and its potential impact on the preparation of the 2044 plan. He expressed concerns about the compressed 30-month timetable for the new plan, highlighting potential risks regarding evidence capability, staff capacity, and public consultation fatigue. He also suggested that it would be wise to include the new shadow unitary authority in the May 2027 consultation to avoid future renegotiation of strategic elements.

These points were responded to by Julie Pinnock, Corporate Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, Adrian Fox, Strategic Planning Manager and Sarah Armstrong, Service Lead: Built Environment. It was advised that the government was clear on the 30-month statutory timetable and that the council would cooperate with neighbouring authorities during the unitary transition. It was clarified that a Judicial Review could only challenge the plan on procedural grounds within a six-week window post-adoption. Regarding planning documents, it was explained that existing SPDs would remain in force while the 2040 plan was active but would lose their status under the new 2044 plan.

The committee was asked to consider the attached report, ref CL177, which was to be considered by cabinet at its meeting on 18 March 2026, and to consider whether there were any items of significance to be drawn to the attention of Cabinet.

The committee proceeded to ask questions and debate the report. In summary, the following matters were raised.

1. Clarification was sought on whether any judicial review challenge would primarily focus on the procedure and process followed for the development of the plan rather than its content.
2. Assurances were sought that the council would continue to prioritise the pursuit of brownfield sites despite the inspector's removal of the "brownfield first" strategy wording.
3. A question was asked to confirm whether the adoption of the plan immediately restored a defensible five-year housing land supply and protected the district against speculative development.

4. Further clarification was sought on whether the risk of the five-year land supply diminishing over the next five years was affected by the rate at which developers brought allocated sites forward.
5. A question was asked requesting a summary of conclusions drawn from the past five years' work regarding fluctuating housing numbers and how these experiences matched calculations in the new NPPF.
6. Clarification was requested regarding risk management and how vulnerable the council was to the plan falling short of providing a five-year land supply over the next five years.
7. A question was asked regarding whether the local plan process was adequately resourced throughout and what impact staffing or budget pressures had on delivery.
8. A question was asked as to whether officers felt that rural communities had been treated equitably in the process design and what steps were taken to ensure this was a proportionate and effective engagement.
9. Clarification was sought on whether additional housing from windfall sites would be deducted from the new plan numbers, as had been done previously.
10. A question was asked regarding whether the council would actively communicate with developers to encourage efficient use of land and increase housing density on sites.
11. Further clarification was sought on how free-text responses from public consultations had been analysed, specifically regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), how human validation was applied, and what lessons were learned for the future compressed 30-month process.
12. A question was asked regarding the reasoning behind the inspector amending the air quality management clause (MM31) and whether it was seen as a particular barrier in the planning process.
13. Clarification was requested on why the inspector had amended the wastewater provisions (MM32) and what the implications of these changes were.
14. A question was asked regarding what the consequences and sanctions would be if the council failed to meet the 30-month deadline for the new local plan.
15. Assurances were sought regarding implementation readiness and whether officers were confident that infrastructure providers could deliver in line with the trajectory.
16. A question was asked whether the plan provided enough certainty that nutrient constraints would not constrain housing delivery.
17. Clarification was sought on whether the council was operationally ready to deliver the new biodiversity net gain and Habitats Regulations Assessment requirements.
18. A question was asked regarding whether officers had the technical capability to apply and enforce new energy efficiency standards such as

Low Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) and Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM).

19. In addition, it was asked how the council would manage the transition period before officers were able to review planning applications against the new energy efficiency standards and a timetable was requested detailing the transition period for implementing the new energy efficiency requirements.
20. A question was asked regarding the monitoring framework and whether the monitoring indicators and reporting requirements were robust enough, particularly for affordable housing, climate, and transport.

These points were responded to by Julie Pinnock, Corporate Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, Adrian Fox, Strategic Planning Manager and Sarah Armstrong, Service Lead: Built Environment, Councillor Martin Tod, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Councillor Jackie Porter, Cabinet Member for Place and Local Plan accordingly.

#### RESOLVED:

The committee agreed the following comments and recommended to cabinet:

1. That a clear timetable be provided detailing the transition period for upskilling staff and implementing the new energy efficiency standards (LETI/BREEAM) within the planning application process.
2. That a briefing be arranged for members detailing how the council planned to meet the compressed 30-month deadline for the Local Plan 2044 while ensuring adequate and robust public consultation.

#### 7. **TO NOTE THE DATE AND TIME OF FUTURE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE**

The dates for meetings of the committee for the 2026/27 Municipal year were noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 11.20 am

Chairperson