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Birmingham City Council – Issues and Options Consultation



Birmingham City Council has recently launched a consultation on the Issues and Options document for its emerging Local Plan, which will guide development in the area for the next 20 years. The document outlines a major shift in direction for how the Council propose to deliver the housing required for the local area. The consultation closes at 5pm on 5 December 2022.

The Issues and Options [consultation](#) represents the first formal stage in the plan-making process for the future City Plan, with the next stage being the Preferred Options consultation currently scheduled for October 2023, moving towards adoption of the Plan, currently anticipated for summer 2026.

Challenges and The Vision

The document sets out that Birmingham has seen a ‘return to growth’ over the last 30 years which has resulted in transformative change. This has been as a result of a number of factors, including the investment which the recent Commonwealth Games has brought, along with the planned High Speed 2 rail connections. The Council say that 2022 represents the start of a “Golden Decade of Opportunity for Birmingham”.

This growth has not come without its challenges. Of particular focus is the climate crisis, and the City Council has pledged to achieve net zero carbon and build climate change resilience. Another significant challenge is that of housing, and how the plan process can deliver the number of homes which the area needs. Birmingham is surrounded by Green Belt land and indeed 15% of the city’s land area is covered by the designation. This makes delivering housing, as well as other necessary uses and infrastructure, difficult. Other challenges outlined include delivering infrastructure, an inclusive economy, growing the digital economy and protecting and conserving Birmingham’s heritage assets and natural environments.

The document is clear that in order to meet these challenges, innovative solutions will need to be found which require the Council to take a change in approach. In order to help guide this direction, the Council have drafted a vision for Birmingham in 2042 which at its heart seeks for the city **"to be a world class net zero city built on a vibrant inclusive economy and a resilient, green and beautiful environment where people and business can thrive and reach their full potential"**.

The Housing Challenge

The Issues and Options document sets out that there is an anticipated need for 7,136 homes/annum. Housing delivery over the last five years (average) was 3,347 homes/annum – therefore, more than double the current rate of housing delivery will be required. A significant need for affordable housing has also been identified (2,997 dwellings/annum).

The Issues and Options document is very open that achieving these numbers will be a huge challenge and an approach to maximise delivery on brownfield land may not be sufficient to meet these targets. Therefore, the Council have set out six potential options which could meet housing need, although it is acknowledged that even if all options were adopted there would still be a significant housing shortfall. The options are:

- **Option 1: Increase housing densities** by increasing the density requirements from 100 dwellings/ha to 400 dwellings/ha in the City Centre and increasing requirements elsewhere.
- **Option 2: More active public sector land assembly** through acquiring larger sites, possibly through the use of CPO where necessary.
- **Option 3: Further comprehensive housing regeneration** through identifying further housing regeneration areas to deliver better homes.
- **Option 4: Utilise poor quality under-used open space for housing** where the space is of limited value.
- **Option 5: Utilise some employment land for housing** through repurposing poorer quality and underused land outside of the Core Employment Areas.
- **Option 6: Release Green Belt for housing**, albeit this is very much set out as a 'last resort' if all alternative options (including working with neighbouring authorities) are exhausted.

If brought forward, these Options have the potential to significantly transform Birmingham, particularly the city centre. The City Council published a separate Design Guide Principles Document in September 2022 which refers to the current adopted policies in respect of density to reflect surrounding context. We will need to see if and how the policy approaches within the Design Guide change as a result of these Options, particularly in respect of tall buildings and changing contexts.

The document also sets out in relative detail the type of housing which the Council needs, and some policy approaches for how this could be achieved. This includes a proposal to review the affordable housing policy requirement of 35%, to test whether a higher contribution could be viable.

There is also reference to the growing Build to Rent ('BtR') sector which the Council notes can **"add to the choice of good quality accommodation"**. This aligns with our [recent \(May 2022\) research](#) which anticipates that Birmingham's BtR market is set to boom over the next few years, with the City achieving the second highest investment volume in this sector across UK cities in 2021. In response to this, the Issues and Options document suggests introducing a new specific BtR policy to guide BtR development in the City.

The Challenge to Grow an Inclusive Economy

Building a strong economy is one of the key opportunities identified in the document, and in particular the vision envisages a world class city of knowledge and innovation. Specifically in respect of employment land, the document sets out a shortfall of 73.64 ha of land above that identified to date which will need to be found through the Local Plan preparation process. Should 'Option 5' for the housing challenge be utilised, it will be interesting to see how the dynamic between the need for housing and the need for employment land will be managed.

The Climate Change Challenge

The Issues and Options document sets out that there are various planning measures which could be adopted to help support the Council's aims of net zero and building climate resilience. A range of policy changes are proposed, including:

- Requiring all development to be zero carbon;
- Requiring development to meet higher environmental standards;
- Potential requirement of schemes to be provided with heat network infrastructure; and
- Strengthening policy on waste management and resource efficiency.

It will be interesting to see how such policies develop, particularly given the focus and depth of detail on these types of policies which are emerging in other local authorities, particularly within London.

Next Steps

The consultation on the Issues and Options document **closes at 5pm on 5 December 2022**. A Preferred Options consultation is anticipated in October 2023, moving to publication of a draft Local Plan in October 2024 and adoption in summer 2026.

If you would like to make comments, or require planning and development advice regarding sites in Birmingham, please do contact us and we'd be happy to help.

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