

Date of meeting:	09 March 2026
Title of Report:	Plymouth Local Plan: commencement, programme and delivery arrangements
Lead Member:	Councillor John Stephens (Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Transport)
Lead Strategic Director:	Glenn Caplin-Grey (Strategic Director for Growth)
Author:	Jonathan Bell (Head of Spatial Planning & Sustainable Development)
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to seek authorisation the formal commencement of a new Local Plan for Plymouth by 30 June 2026, to set out a proposed timetable and programme, and to put in place appropriate delegated authorities for the programme moving forward. The report also highlights the significant achievements of the current Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) and looks ahead to the role the new Local Plan in refreshing and delivering the Plymouth radical vision for growth and transformation.

Recommendations and Reasons

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the publication of the Plymouth Local Plan timetable.

Reason: To meet the requirements for the new plan-making system for local plans prepared and adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023, and to comply with proposed plan-making regulations that are described in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Plan-making Regulations Explainer, published on 27 November 2025.

2. Approves the publication of the Council's formal 'Notice of Intention to Commence' the Plymouth Local Plan before 30 June 2026.

Reason: To comply with the requirements set out in the Written Ministerial Statement and proposed plan-making regulations that are described in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Plan-making Regulations Explainer, published on 27 November 2025, and to enable the City Council to benefit from potential government funding for local planning authorities that commit to start their local plans by 30 June 2026 and complete Gateway 1 by 31 October 2026.

3. Delegates authority to approve updates to the Local Plan timetable to the Service Director for Strategic Planning & Infrastructure, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport.

Reason: To reflect the need for possible amendments to the timetable, including where set out in the proposed plan-making regulations as described in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Plan-making Regulations Explainer, published on 27 November 2025, and to be able to respond to any issues arising from the local government reorganisation and spatial development strategy processes.

4. Delegates authority to approve, publish and submit the required documents and statements for statutory Gateways 1, 2 and 3 to the Service Director for Strategic Planning & Infrastructure, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport.

Reason: In order to ensure that the Plymouth Local Plan can be adopted within a 30-month period, as required by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's '30-month local plan process: an overview', published on 27 November 2025.

5. Delegates authority to approve all evidence documents, reports and supporting data and analysis for publication to the Service Director for Strategic Planning & Infrastructure, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport.

Reason: To ensure the effective and efficient preparation of supporting evidence and material for the Plymouth Local Plan to ensure the overall timetable to adoption can be met.

6. Delegates authority to deliver the statutory 'scoping stage' consultation to the Service Director for Strategic Planning & Infrastructure, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning & Transport.

Reason: To ensure that statutory Gateway 1 can be completed 31 October 2026 which is a conditional date for potential government grant funding, and to support the efficient delivery of the local plan programme.

7. Instructs Officers to report to Cabinet for approval for the statutory consultation on the proposed local plan content and evidence.

Reason: To ensure that there is appropriate political oversight of the proposed content and evidence of the Plymouth Local Plan prior to the statutory consultation stage.

8. Instructs Officers to report to Cabinet for approval for the statutory consultation on the proposed Plymouth Local Plan.

Reason: To ensure that there is appropriate political oversight of the proposed Plymouth Local Plan prior to the statutory consultation stage.

9. Instructs officers to report to Cabinet to approve any further changes to the Plymouth Local Plan following the statutory consultation.

Reason: To ensure that Cabinet has oversight of any further changes to the content of the Plymouth Local Plan in response to representations received during the period of statutory consultation prior to submission for Independent Examination.

10. Delegates authority to formally submit the proposed Plymouth Local Plan for Independent Examination once Gateway 3 is successfully completed.

Reason: To ensure that the Local Plan is promptly submitted for examination once Gateway 3 is successfully completed in order for the overall 30-month local plan timetable to be achieved.

11. Authorises officers to agree a dedicated work programme with the Scrutiny Management Board on the emerging Plymouth Local Plan.

Reason: To ensure detailed scrutiny oversight and consideration at key stages of the local plan programme.

12. Authorises officers to explore with Devon County Council the opportunity of fulfilling the City Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to minerals and waste planning through the preparation of a Joint Minerals and Waste Plan rather than by incorporating waste and minerals policies into the Plymouth Local Plan.

Reason: To simplify the preparation of the Plymouth Local Plan in order that it can comply with the mandatory 30-month plan preparation period and to explore opportunities for joint working recognising that minerals and waste issues are more effectively and efficiently planned at a strategic level given that these often transcend current and potentially new local government boundaries.

13. Agree to the cancellation of the Plymouth and South West Devon Statement of Community Involvement for the purposes of community engagement in planning in Plymouth, with community engagement being undertaken in accordance with the Council's Engagement and Consultation Framework and the statutory requirements of the Local Plan Regulations.

Reason: To ensure that the preparation of the new Plymouth Local Plan reflects the philosophy and approach to community engagement set out in the City Council's Engagement and Consultation Framework and also complies with the emerging new local plan regulations.

Alternative options considered and rejected

As the preparation of the new Local Plan is a statutory requirement, the only alternative relates to the timing of when the Local Plan is commenced. The latest which we could formally commence the Local Plan is 6 months later than proposed in the preferred option. This is because the government has set a backstop date for commencement of 31 December 2026, with the first statutory Gateway point being reached by 30 April 2027. From that point is locked into a statutory timetable. Were the plan commencement to be delayed to the latest possible time, the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process and the Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) process would be further advanced.

However, this option was rejected for a number of reasons, including:

- The pressing need for the Local Plan to be in place to support wider strategic initiatives, deliver much needed housing given the city's absence of a Five Year Housing Land Supply.
- The opportunity to seek government grant funding by committing to commencement by 30 June 2026, having regard to the fact that we would have been legally required to start by December in any case.
- The fact that our current published local plan timetable identified our start date as January 2026, and we are only later because of the government's delay in publishing the new Local Plan Regulations.
- With regard to the LGR process, the government has been clear that this should not delay the preparation of local plans and during the early stages of the process we should know what the government's LGR proposal is and be able to adapt accordingly. The new local plan process requires regular updates to the timetable to enable adjustments to be made when needed.

- With regard to SDS process, there is no proposal in place for our part of the south-west region, but as for LGR we will have the opportunity to adapt if and when needed.
- To improve our resilience for LGR and SDS, and because it is good strategic planning practice, our evidence base work is considering the broader sub-regional context that Plymouth fits within as well as the city itself. We will therefore be in a good place to expand the scope of the local plan during the process if need be.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

As the statutory development plan and spatial strategy for the city, the Plymouth Local Plan has a role to play in supporting each of the six priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and the three strategic objectives of the Plymouth Plan (healthy city; growing city; international city). In essence, the Plymouth Local Plan will represent the spatial strategy of the Plymouth Plan.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

There are costs associated with the delivery of a local plan, including particularly in relation to the need for evidence base studies, legal support, digital plan development, consultation and engagement and the holding of an Independent Examination.

The total cost of the preparation and independent examination of the current Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan (JLP) was c£480,000, with Plymouth City Council's share of this cost being c£224,000.

Although the City Council will need to meet the full costs of the new local plan, as a result of its reduced scope (it's not a joint plan covering a large rural area) and changes to the national local planning system (in particular around reducing the evidence base requirements and a shorter process and independent examination), it is anticipated that the new plan might be delivered for a sum of up to c£300,000.

Additionally, evidence base costs are able to be phased over the period to summer 2028, we are able to use evidence that already exists or which others are leading on, and the financing of an independent examination will not be needed until 2028/29.

On the invitation of the Ministry of Homes Communities and Local Government, we have submitted an application for a grant of in the region of £120,000 which is being made available for local planning authorities who commit to commence local plan preparation by 30 June 2026 and publish a Gateway 1 self assessment by 31 October 2026. With this grant, we anticipate being able to cover any costs for 2026/27 and 2027/28 from existing budgets and provision we have made through the JLP Partnership, and therefore there is no immediate pressure on the Medium Term Financial Plan. Depending on the cost of the independent examination in 2028/29, some additional provision might be needed at that point, but we won't have sufficient data to understand what the likely costs will be until later in the local plan process, probably during 2027/28.

Financial Risks

The primary risk to the revenue budget would arise if the Council was not to breach its statutory requirement to prepare a local plan against the prescribed backstop date. In these circumstances, the government could intervene with the Council picking up the full cost.

With regard to the capital programme, the local plan plays a crucial role in helping to derisk development and infrastructure projects. It is therefore an important risk management measure in relation to any projects in that programme require planning permission.

Legal Implications

Although the enactment of the Local Plan Regulations is still awaited, the government has published an ‘explainer’ setting out what it will be included in these Regulations. It has also made available grant funding for local planning authorities who commit to commencing their plans by 30 June 2026, and this is only possible once the Regulations are enacted.

The report is written in response to the government’s Local Plan Regulations explainer and a whole suite of guidance, all published in November 2025, on how the new local plan system will operate and what the requirements of the new system will be.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

It is too early to be able to advise on the carbon and environmental implications of the new local plan, as we are not at the stage of having a draft plan yet. Therefore, no meaningful Climate Impact Assessment could be prepared. However, it is clear that a local plan has a major role to play in managing the environmental implications of development and growth and putting in place positive measures for natural infrastructure, climate mitigation and climate adaptation.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council’s duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

Other implications will be able to be identified once there is a draft local plan being considered.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Plymouth Local Plan Background Report							
B	EIA							

Background papers:

**Add rows as required to box below*

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Paul Barnard											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 09/02/2026											
Cabinet Member approval: <i>Councillor John Stephens approved by email</i> Date approved: 16/02/2026											