Spatial Strategy Background Paper
The Cheltenham Plan 2011 – 2031

Cheltenham Borough Council

January 2018

Contents

1. Portrait of the Borough

Area

1.1   Cheltenham Borough covers an area of 4,680 hectares. The Borough is primarily urban, although it includes surrounding areas of countryside and has a network of villages. 17% of the Borough is designated as Green Belt, 22% as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Location

1.2   Cheltenham lies between the Cotswolds and the vale of the River Severn. The town itself is relatively flat, although there are gentle slopes down to the River Chelt, which runs through the town centre. Beyond Leckhampton, Charlton Kings and Prestbury the land rises steeply towards the escarpment of the Cotswold Hills, which have been designated an area of outstanding natural beauty.

1.3   Cheltenham is one of Gloucestershire's two major urban settlements. The City of Gloucester, which is of comparable size to Cheltenham, is only 12 kilometres to the South West; the growth of two major towns in such close proximity is unusual. Both are sub-regional shopping centres. Collectively, this combined urban core has a population of approximately 245,000.

1.4   Three main roads pass through Cheltenham; the A40 London/Oxford/South Wales route; the A46/B4632 Coventry/Bath road; and the A435 Evesham/Cirencester road. In addition, the M5 motorway links to Birmingham and the north and south towards Bristol, the West Country and Exeter. The M5 passes within 5 kilometres of the town centre.

1.5   There are 3 motorway junctions accessing Cheltenham – Junctions 10, 11 and 11a. Junction 10 is not currently all movements and this impacts on connectivity.

1.6   Cheltenham Spa railway station, which is 1.6 kilometres from the town centre, is on the Bristol - Birmingham line, with an inter-city service to London via Gloucester. Located at Staverton to the west of Cheltenham and the M5 is Gloucestershire Airport, a civil airport which handles 70-90,000 flights per year making it the UK's busiest general aviation airport.

1.7   Cheltenham is uniquely positioned in terms of connectivity to strategic transport but this could be improved.

Historical development

1.8   Although Cheltenham has existed as a small town since Saxon times, centred on the present High Street, it was not until mineral waters were discovered in the vicinity in 1718 and began to be exploited in the 1740's that the town began to expand. The visit of George III to take the spa waters in 1788 established the town as a fashionable resort, although large-scale growth did not take place until more settled times, after the French wars in 1815.

1.9   Extensive development from this date gave rise to large areas of Regency architecture at Pittville, Montpellier and Lansdown with associated elegant parks, private grounds and wide, tree-lined avenues which now form the basis of the Cheltenham (Central) Conservation Area.

1.10 This Regency townscape, the town's fine topographical setting and it's high quality shopping and other facilities provide Cheltenham with its attractive image and makes it a major draw

for tourists, a key business address for major employers, and contributes to the quality of life for residents.

Present-day Cheltenham

1.11 Cheltenham has become an important employment centre with a strong emphasis on office work, accommodating the national and regional administrative headquarters of a number of major firms together with the Government's Communication Headquarters (GCHQ), which is a civil service department. On the manufacturing side, a wide range of industries is represented in the Borough, although light engineering is a speciality.

1.12 Recreation and tourism have also become very important. Besides its museums, parks and gardens, the Borough possesses many sporting facilities, including swimming pools, an athletics stadium and indoor recreational facilities. Cheltenham is famous for its national hunt racing, hosts the popular county cricket festival annually and has an internationally renowned festival calendar.

1.13 Cheltenham is an educational centre, with a number of public schools, a College of Further Education (Gloscat), and the University of Gloucestershire. The University plays an important role in the life of the town, providing education for over 8,000 students and direct employment for 1,250 people at five campuses.

1.14 The annual festivals of music, the Everyman Theatre, Playhouse and Bacon theatres enrich the Borough's cultural life and give the town a more than local significance.

Deprivation

1.15 Though many people consider Cheltenham to be an affluent town and a town of wealth creation, there are key challenges arising from the fact that there are also areas of significant deprivation.

1.16 According to the 2015 English Indices of Deprivation, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in September 2015, Cheltenham is the district in Gloucestershire that displays the most extremes in deprivation. Whilst the district contains areas that rank extremely well nationally in terms of overall deprivation, there are also areas of high deprivation. Out of the 13 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Gloucestershire that rank in the top 10% most deprived nationally, 3 are located in Cheltenham.

1.17 Cheltenham has the highest proportion of population (44%) of all Gloucestershire districts living within the least deprived quintile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and the second highest proportion of population (10%) in the most deprived quintile.

1.18 Cheltenham's worst ranking domain remains "Crime and Disorder" with 26% of the district's population living within LSOAs ranked in the most deprived national quintile.

1.19 Cheltenham contains the county's most deprived LSOAs for "Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)" and "Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOPI)".

1.20 Cheltenham has seen a relative improvement in the national rankings since 2010 for "Barriers to Housing and Services" (Cheltenham ranks best in the county) and "Living Environment", but has slipped in the rankings for "Health Deprivation and Disability."

Context

1.21 Cheltenham Borough adjoins 2 other District Councils – Cotswold District to the east and Tewkesbury Borough to the north, south and west.

1.22 Cotswold District includes a substantial part of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and contains many scattered villages. Future development in the area will be focused on the largest town, Cirencester.

1.23 Tewkesbury District lies largely in the Severn Vale and provides a hinterland for both Cheltenham and Gloucester. Both Tewkesbury town and Bishop's Cleeve have grown significantly in the last decade, and further development has taken place at Brockworth, to the east of Gloucester. There is a strong inter-relationship between the settlements in the central Severn Vale area, with substantial traffic movements, particularly journeys to work.

1.24 Cheltenham's role as a sub-regional centre will ensure that the growing population of these areas will continue to look towards it for employment and other services and facilities, and will generate an increasing number of trips into the town.

2. Relationship between the Cheltenham Plan and the Joint Core Strategy

2.1 The JCS partnership was set up to positively address the development needs for Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury local authority areas. This reflects the fact that the full development needs of Cheltenham and Gloucester cannot be met within their respective administrative boundaries. Consequently, a decision was taken for the three councils to work positively and constructively in addressing these needs. There is also a functional relationship between the three authority areas which together form the main economic drivers for the County of Gloucestershire.

2.2 The JCS spatial strategy sets out the key spatial priorities for the JCS area including Cheltenham Borough. Policy SP1 sets out the overall strategy concerning the amount of development required and Policy SP2 clarifies the distribution of new development. These two higher order policies are supported by other JCS policies (such as those on the economy) and provide the overall spatial strategy for the plan area.

2.3 The JCS seeks to locate as much development as possible in and around the main settlements of Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury. This is the most sustainable approach, allowing new developments to integrate with existing communities and benefit from existing and enhanced access to jobs, services, transport networks and green infrastructure.

2.4 Owing to significant constraints on the availability of land within Cheltenham's administrative area, the JCS recognises that development opportunities need to be provided outside the Borough's boundary. These opportunities take the form of strategic allocations of land to the west and north-west of the town and primarily lie within the administrative area of Tewkesbury.

2.5 The JCS acknowledges that the spatial strategy embodied within the plan will need to be supported by forthcoming district plans (and neighbourhood plans) as necessary and appropriate. With the JCS reaching adoption in December 2017, it now falls to the Cheltenham Plan to provide this support.

3. Strategic Vision for the Area

3.1 The Cheltenham Plan has been prepared to conform with the vision of the **Cheltenham Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2028.** This says:
"We want Cheltenham to deliver a sustainable quality of life, where people, families, their communities and businesses thrive, and in a way which cherishes our cultural and natural heritage, reduces our impact on climate change and does not compromise the quality of life of present and future generations."

3.2 The Cheltenham Plan is also being developed alongside an emerging **Place Strategy**. This strategy looks to embed 4 key values:
  - o Being Pioneering
  - o Being Creative
  - o Being Nurturing
  - o Connecting & re-connecting

3.2 The Cheltenham Plan itself contains an extensive vision which requires that:
"Cheltenham is a place where people live in strong, safe, healthy, well-served and well-connected communities which are successful and sustainable places in which to live and work and which contain the necessary infrastructure to support social and cultural life together with space for people and places to evolve in future."

"Cheltenham is a place with a prosperous and enterprising economy where education, skills and employment opportunities are increasing and diversifying, where businesses choose to invest and deliver increased value of economic output, and where the benefits are felt by all."

"Cheltenham is a place where the quality and sustainability of our cultural assets and natural and built environment are valued and recognised locally, nationally and internationally and where tourists choose to visit and return."

4. Translating the Strategic Vision into Spatial Priorities

4.1   The Cheltenham Plan has been designed to function as a land use interpretation and spatial expression of the *Sustainable Community Strategy* and emerging *Place Strategy.* In addition, it provides a spatial framework for delivering the Cheltenham Plan vision and strategic objectives set out above.

4.2   Cheltenham's development pattern is encompassed on all sides by the Cotswolds AONB and Green Belt. Within the borough are a number of villages such as Prestbury, Leckhampton, Charlton Kings and Swindon Village which, although significantly influenced by the expansion of Cheltenham, retain their own character and 'village' feel. The town is characterised by its high-quality historic environment, set within a formal garden townscape and a wider open landscape, defined by the Cotswolds AONB and the Green Belt. This is effective in delineating Cheltenham from the neighbouring City of Gloucester and the settlement of Bishop's Cleeve. Public consultation undertaken as part of the JCS process emphasised the importance of retaining the separation of Cheltenham and protecting the qualities which make the Borough unique.

4.3   Cheltenham will continue to follow the principles that has seen it referred to as 'a town within a park', retaining its Regency character, tree-lined promenades and streets, and attractive green spaces and squares, while creating contemporary, new developments.

4.4   The town itself will continue to be a sub-regional focal point for economic and cultural activity and, therefore, the Cheltenham Plan makes provision for affordable housing, jobs, infrastructure and facilities to support mixed and balanced communities and attract inward investment. However, as there is limited capacity to accommodate all these competing development objectives within the urban area, some peripheral development is needed.

4.5   Cheltenham has little opportunity for expansion owing to a tightly drawn administrative boundary together with Green Belt and AONB designations which combine to surround the Borough and severely constrain opportunities for development.

4.6   However, some changes to the green belt have taken place as a result of the JCS process and have led to the designation of land to the west of the town. These new strategic sites, totaling 453 ha., and represented by JCS allocations A4 (North-West Cheltenham) and A7 (West Cheltenham), will help cater for much of Cheltenham's housing and employment needs up to 2031. When coupled with the Cheltenham Plan's proposal for the sensitive development of a number of small sites within an amended Principal Urban Area, the Borough is well placed to meet objectively assessed housing and employment needs.

4.7   In respect of the latter, Cheltenham has an ageing stock of employment sites and over the last decade, companies have started to relocate away from the area. This needs to be addressed through the provision of high-quality, fit for purpose premises both in the town centre and in the form of a number of appropriate-scale business parks elsewhere in the Borough in order to retain and attract investment, thereby supporting the economic resilience of Cheltenham and the wider JCS area.

5. Principles Underpinning the Spatial Priorities

5.1   Para 17 of the NPPF sets out the 12 core land use planning principles that should underpin both plan-making and decision taking. The Cheltenham Plan has been prepared with all these principles in mind and the spatial strategy that has emerged is designed to manage and proactively drive the process of sustainable economic development and create thriving communities whilst conserving and enhancing the intrinsic character and beauty of our natural surroundings. Amongst the key principles considered are:

Opportunities presented by suitable brownfield sites

5.2   There is a public perception that Cheltenham has a large supply of brownfield sites; this is not the case. However, the Cheltenham Plan recognises the value of re-using land where this offers deliverable options for the future.

5.3   Even though Cheltenham is not well represented in terms of brownfield land, the Plan has been able to advance allocations on a small number of previously developed sites. The Plan will also seek to achieve high density development where appropriate and seek the use of imaginative and sustainable design solutions in site layout and building construction.

Adherence to strictly defined urban limits

5.4   Strictly defined urban limits are necessary to make a clear spatial distinction between urban land uses and those in more rural surroundings. The Cheltenham Plan looks to allocate development within the urban area first, followed by non-designated areas outside the existing urban area, and finally within designated areas.

Clear locational preferences

5.5   Locational preferences have been determined on the basis of a number of factors including the size and physical capacity of the Borough's administrative area; its topography and geography; the possibility of integrating new development successfully with existing settlements; the requirement to reduce the need to travel and create more sustainable patterns of living, the need to avoid flood risk and making a contribution to increased risk of flooding.

Adequate infrastructure, services and facilities

5.6   The spatial priorities of the Plan largely reflect the level of existing infrastructure provision. In some circumstances however, priorities are made where it is considered that additional capacity can be readily provided to serve new development or where, as a result of new development, benefits would be delivered over a wider area.

Protecting and enhancing the environment

5.7   Successful, thriving communities are formed through many social interactions taking place in a high quality environment. Whilst it is essential that the Borough develops and prospers in future, it is important that this does not occur at the expense of the environment. The spatial priorities of the Cheltenham Plan have therefore been determined with due regard to the various facets of the natural, historic and built environment including any protectionist designations that may exist.

5.8   The site assessment process that follows has taken the aforementioned planning principles and applied them to the sites that have been agreed by Council for inclusion as potential development allocations in the Cheltenham Plan.

6. Site Selection Methodology

6.1　The Council is required to maintain a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) which also applies to employment land. For this reason the three JCS councils agreed to combine housing and employment assessments in to one document which is known as the Strategic Assessment of Land Availability (SALA) and is updated annually.

6.2　Essentially, the document is a technical database of sites which have been submitted to the Council for consideration for future development. The SALA assessment process entails testing sites from a deliverability perspective and questions whether constraints can be overcome and whether sites are attractive to the market.

6.3　Sites are submitted annually through a process known as the "call for sites". The Council invites landowners, key stakeholders, land/planning agents and anyone with a local land interest to submit sites for consideration. However, having a site in the SALA does not necessarily mean that it will be automatically allocated for development. Rather, the SALA represents a pool from which the Council can select suitable sites to allocate. Sites can only be allocated for development through the Joint Core Strategy, the Cheltenham Plan or Neighbourhood Development Plan.

6.4　The SALA methodology categorises any site in the Green Belt or AONB as 'Unsuitable'. This focus on sites within the urban area fits with the Cheltenham Plan's sequential approach to development. As outlined under the Principles Underpinning the Spatial Strategy (above), the Plan looks to allocate development within the urban area first, followed by non-designated areas outside the urban area, and finally within designated areas outside the urban area.

6.5　The 2015 Issues and Options consultation document presented 103 potential site allocations which had been assessed through the SALA process. The majority of comments made in relation to those sites expressed the need to maintain the existing urban boundaries. There was also some concern about potential development on Green Belt, the AONB and other greenfield sites. However, a number of respondents focused on the need to boost the supply of housing in line with the NPPF and many also referenced the JCS examination that was ongoing during that time and challenged Cheltenham's housing numbers (objectively assessed housing need).

6.6　Following the Issues and Options consultation, officers continued to update information held about potential development sites by conducting a programme of assessment. All sites were subjected to basic, high-level criteria to filter out those which would either not be suitable for development or would not benefit from having a policy allocation.

6.7　The filtered sites were then discussed at an officer panel. The input of the Conservation, Development Management, Trees, Streetscape, Landscape and Highways teams was collected in order to gain a better understanding of individual site constraints and opportunities.

Integrated (Sustainability) Appraisal

6.8   The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is to promote sustainable development through the integration of environmental, social and economic considerations in the preparation of plans. SA is an iterative process undertaken throughout plan preparation to ensure the emergence of a land use strategy that is as sustainable as possible.

6.9   The requirement for SA is in accordance with planning legislation and Para 165 of the National Planning Policy Framework. Plans must also be subject to Regulations for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Government advises that an integrated approach is taken so that the SA process incorporates the requirements for SEA – and to the same level of detail.

6.10 The Council commissioned independent specialist consultants, Enfusion, to progress the appraisal in May 2015. The SA of the Cheltenham Plan also addresses health and equality issues alongside the requirements of the Habitats Assessment Regulations (HRA). The findings of the health/equality and habitats assessments have been integrated into the SA. This is consistent with the approach taken to SA/SEA, EqIA and HRA for the Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy.