

Joint Cabinet Committee

18 December 2025

Minutes

*Held at Parade, Royal Leamington Spa CV32 4AT
Meeting commenced: 6.00 p.m. Meeting ended: 7.50 p.m.*

Present: Councillor Ian Davison (Chair) Councillors L Coles, G Cowcher, S Juned, C King and Williams

Also in attendance: Councillor Boad (Liberal Democrat Group Leader Warwick District Council, Observer)
Councillor Chilvers (Warwick District Council – at the invitation of the Chair)
Councillor Crump (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Observer)
Councillor Day (Conservative Group Leader Warwick District Council, Observer)
Councillor Falp (Joint Chair of the South Warwickshire Plan Advisory Group – at the invitation of the Chair)
Councillor Milton (Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Warwick District Council, Observer)
Councillor Pemberton (Conservative Group Leader Stratford-on-Avon District Council, Observer)
Councillor Rock (Joint Chair of the South Warwickshire Plan Advisory Group – at the invitation of the Chair)
Councillor Wightman (Independent Group Leader Warwick District Council, Observer)

Apologies: Councillors D Passingham and S Whalley-Hoggins

1. Appointment of Chair

It was proposed by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor Juned that Councillor Davison be appointed as Chair for the meeting.

There being no other nominations, it was

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Davison be appointed as Chair up to the next meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

See above.

3. Disclosures of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2024 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

5. Revised timetable for preparation of the South Warwickshire Local Plan

Councillor Cowcher (Deputy Leader – Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Stratford-on-Avon District Council)
Councillor King (Place Portfolio Warwick District Council)

The Committee considered a report which sought Members' consideration and approval of revisions to the currently published timetable for preparing the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) as contained at Appendix 1 to the report. The timetable could then inform a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) for each District, which would then be published by each authority. It was a government requirement that Local Authorities published and kept up to date the Local Development Schemes (LDSs) for the Local Plan area. The report set out that the timescale for the publication of the Regulation 19 stage of the SWLP had to be extended from the timetable provided to Joint Committee in December 2024 to assimilate key evidence being prepared.

The report set out that, despite this delay in getting the plan to the Regulation 19 publication stage, it was considered that the SWLP could be submitted to the Government's Planning Inspectorate (PINS) by 31 December 2026 and therefore, be considered through the existing plan making arrangements. The report set out measures to be put in place to ensure the document was submission ready and actions were being taken to mitigate the possibility of further timetable delays. Nonetheless, the timetable did contain risks which, if realised, would push the timetable back.

The report set out revisions to the currently published timetable for preparing the SWLP as contained at Appendix 1 to the report and in paragraph 1.3 of the report. The timetable would inform updated LDSs for both authorities which were required to be kept up to date by the Government in relation to Local Plan preparation. The report set out the intention to commence consultation on the Regulation 19 publication version by no later than the 8 June 2026 so the formal consultation could be undertaken before the school summer holidays, and to bring the date forward where the possibility to do so arose. The timetable showed the intention to submit the plan to the Planning Inspectorate by 31 December 2026 to avoid significant delay in plan preparation by having to switch to the new plan-making procedures which came into force after that date for any plans not submitted by then.

The report set out the reasons why the timetable had to be extended for evidence collection purposes before the publication version of Regulation 19 consultation could commence. Primarily the revisions to the timetable

were due to feedback on soft market testing from consultants that could undertake the studies needed, consultants not being able to resource a surge in demand from Local Authorities needing support in preparation of the plan evidence base, a high level of representations received to the Preferred Options version of the plan which had needed to be processed, revisions to national guidance which required the updating of study work done in respect of the Green Belt, and the need to engage with and gain support from key consultees to meet the timetable with their own resource pressures and priorities.

The report set out the risks identified in achieving the timetable in the report and in Appendices 2 and 3 to the report, and the mitigation being undertaken to address the risks. This included undertaking due diligence via support from an experienced Barrister, taking up the offer of support from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to prepare a submission ready plan by the 31 December 2026, undertaking critical friend review work with the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) and high-level management engagement with key consultees providing input on the plan to work with the timetable proposed at Appendix 1 to the report.

The report assessed the alternatives of the two proposed recommendations contained in the report. That was to pivot to preparing the plan under the new plan making procedures and to accept that there would be lengthy delay and associated higher costs and abortive costs to date; to undertake the Regulation 19 consultation stage sooner but recognised the significantly increased risk that the plan might not be supported by a proportional and sound evidence base; or to stop preparing the plan with the potential reputational damage, government intervention, loss of control of a local development strategy for the area, and the potential for increased speculative development without planned infrastructure of the scale that could be required and the potential higher appeal costs associated should the local authorities choose to refuse the speculative development without a five-year housing land supply. This analysis helped inform the recommendations.

In terms of alternative options, the local authorities could look to pivot preparing the SWLP through the new plan-making arrangements which were expected to come into force from 1 January 2026, though secondary legislation was yet to be enacted. However, negatives to this approach were that it was envisaged that the plan would be expected to start at stage 1 of the new process. As a result, it was anticipated that whilst much evidence would have been readied, there would be an estimated delay of two to three years, based on informal discussions with the PAS whilst the plan moved through the new process. This would heighten concerns in respect of time expiry of the current adopted plans at a time when neither of the Local Authorities were able to demonstrate delivery of a five-year housing land supply. In addition, the new system would not be tried and tested and therefore, there was potential for further delays to ensue as local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate navigated the new system. Finally, the delays could result in significant monies being wasted on the plan to date and it was considered that

costs could increase by pivoting to the new system as delays could require the evidence to be updated.

The local authorities had looked to see whether they could publish a Local Plan earlier than proposed and the timetable as set out reflected this assessment. It was considered that based on feedback from the consultants undertaking the preparation of studies for the plan, that if done any earlier the work would not be sufficiently complete. The timetable was therefore considered to provide the appropriate balance between doing things quicker and the risk of failing at Examination. Getting approval for the plan was also key to moving forward with addressing the five-year land supply issues now identified within both Districts.

If the Joint Cabinet did not agree a timetable, it was assumed that officers would nevertheless continue to work on preparing the plan, but the local authorities would not be in a position to update and adopt the LDSs for each District. The approach would not be in accordance with government requirements with unknown consequences for how the Government might intervene. Nor would it allow the public, the wider Councillor membership, key bodies, developers, land promoters, or the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) to be informed of the likely timescales for plan preparation for the SWLP area and to manage its resources accordingly to respond when required to do so.

Another alternative option was for the local authorities to stop preparing a Local Plan for the area. Such an approach would significantly increase the risk of government intervention and reduce the ability of the local authorities to be able to manage development within its own area. The housing requirement set by the Government would still be required to be met, but proposals would likely come forward in an unplanned and uncoordinated way based on speculative applications significantly increasing the risk that a planned and coordinated approach to the delivery of significant infrastructure improvements would be lost. Monies spent to date on the SWLP would also have been wasted whilst costs would be expected to continue to increase in defending any appeals without a plan being in place. For reference, Recommendation 2 of the December 2024 Joint Cabinet Committee Report on the SWLP Preferred Options set out the importance of having an up to date and 'sound' Local Plan.

The Warwick District Overview and Scrutiny Committee highlighted the significant risk that the Local Plan presented to both Warwick District and Stratford-on-Avon District Council's. They requested that officers look at creative ways (including the use of Artificial Intelligence) to mitigate potential delays to timescales whilst maintaining quality and placed emphasis on the importance of 'active travel'. The Warwick District Overview and Scrutiny Committee encouraged the political leadership of the Council's to be active in lobbying government ministers for flexibility to ensure that this process could be successfully delivered.

The Stratford-on-Avon District Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested the following:

- that changes to the risk register be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, along with details regarding changes in expenditure. Although it was noted that risk was usually within the remit of the Audit and Standards Committee, it was thought that the Committee should monitor this in conjunction with its consideration of other aspects of the SWLP;
- that regular updates be provided to the Committee and the South Warwickshire Plan Advisory Group (SWPAG) to ensure the timetable was adhered to;
- that all information be made available to the public as soon as possible, and that Ward Members and Town and Parish Council's be utilised in the pre-engagement process devised between officers and the SWPAG;
- that significant changes since the previous public consultation, such as new sites that had since been identified, be clearly highlighted in the consultation document;
- that a communications plan be devised, including targeted engagement with the areas most likely to be affected by significant development and offering reasons for changes to the Plan and opportunities for dialogue;
- that additional meetings in 2026 be scheduled as soon as possible to ensure transparency and members' availability, and materials provided to the Committee for consideration at the earliest opportunity; and
- that the Terms of Reference and membership details for the SWPAG be made available to members of the Committee.

The following people addressed the Joint Cabinet Committee:

- Councillor Chilvers, speaking in his capacity as a Ward Councillor for Warwick District Brunswick Ward; and
- Councillor Rock, speaking in his capacity as Chair of the South Warwickshire Plan Advisory Group.

The Joint Cabinet Committee thanked officers and Councillors for the significant amount of work undertaken on delivering the South Warwickshire Local Plan so far.

It was proposed by Councillor Davison and seconded by Councillor Williams that Recommendation 1 be amended to the following:

(1) the revised timetable for the preparation of the South Warwickshire Local Plan as set out in 1 to the report, be agreed subject to:

(a) noting with concern that this proposed six-month delay to the Regulation 19 consultation gravely risks failing to meet the government's December deadline;

(b) bringing forward the timetable for this consultation if possible; and

(c) providing councillors with key milestones that are required to meet this tight timeline and progress reports against those milestones.

It was proposed by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor King that officers should:

- set a Terms of Reference with Warwickshire County Council Transport and Planning, emphasising the Plan requirement to continue prioritising active and public transport solutions as part of the 20-minute neighbourhood principles; and
- plan for further work to as far as possible increase projected:
 - a) built out rates; and
 - b) densities in neighbourhood centres and near transport hubs.

It was proposed by Councillor Williams and seconded by Councillor King that the Leaders of the two Councils should speak to the relevant ministers and Civil Servants as a matter of urgency in respect of the delivery of the local plan.

Councillor King proposed the report as laid out, subject to the amendments to Recommendation 1 and the additional recommendations proposed in the meeting, including that The Joint Cabinet Committee thanked officers and Councillors for the significant amount of work undertaken on delivering the South Warwickshire Local Plan so far. It was duly seconded.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the revised timetable for the preparation of the South Warwickshire Local Plan as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed, subject to:
 - (a) noting with concern that this proposed six-month delay to the Regulation 19 consultation gravely risks failing to meet the Government's December deadline;
 - (b) bringing forward the timetable for this consultation, if possible; and
 - (c) providing Councillors with key milestones that are required to meet this tight timeline and progress reports against those milestones;
- (2) That the Local Plan risk register attached at Appendix 2 to the report and the Confidential Appendix 3 to the report and the

mitigations in respect of the principal risks as set out in paragraphs 110.1 to 1.10.4 of the report, be noted;

(3) That officers be requested to undertake the following actions:

- (a) set a Terms of Reference with Warwickshire County Council Transport Planning, emphasising the Plan requirement to continue prioritising active and public transport solutions as part of the 20-minute neighbourhood principles;
- (b) plan for further work to as far as possible increase projected a) build out rates and b) densities in neighbourhood centres and near transport hubs;

(4) That the Leaders of the two Councils speak to the relevant ministers and civil servants as a matter of urgency in respect of the delivery of the Local Plan; and

(5) That officers and Councillors, be formally thanked, for the significant amount of work undertaken on delivering the South Warwickshire Local Plan so far.

6. Exclusion of the Public

The Chair then moved to exclude the public, and it was

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, as set out below.

Minutes Numbers	Paragraph Numbers	Reason
7	3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

7. Exempt Appendix

The confidential appendix was noted.

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

CHAIR