

Report Title:	Rossendale Local Plan: Indicative Timetable, Publish Notice to Commence and Approve Scoping Consultation		
Report to:	Council	Date:	6 May 2026
Report of:	Head of Planning	Cabinet Portfolio:	Planning
Cabinet Lead Member:	Councillor A Barnes	Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency
Integrated Impact Assessment:	Required:	Yes	Attached: No
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Valley Plan Priorities	Thriving Local Economy: This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	High Quality Environment: This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Healthy & Proud Communities: This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Effective & Efficient Council: The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This Report seeks authorisation of the formal commencement of a new Local Plan for Rossendale, to set out a proposed timetable and to agree appropriate delegated authority to progress the new Local Plan. The Council has received £108,000 from MHCLG's Local Plan Implementation Fund to press ahead with the review of the Rossendale Local Plan under the new Local Plan system, introduced 25 March 2026. As a result, the Council is committed to publishing the Notice of Intention to Commence the Local Plan before 30 June 2026 and to publish the Gateway 1 Assessment before 30 October 2026.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council:

- 2.1 Approves a full update of the Rossendale Local Plan to commence in accordance with Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026.
- 2.2 Approves the publication of the Council's formal "Notice of Intention to Commence" the Rossendale Local Plan before 30 June 2026.
- 2.3 Agrees that the Local Plan Steering Group retains oversight of the preparation of the Local Plan
- 2.4 Delegates authority to the Director of Economic Development in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning for the following:

- 2.4.1 to publish the Rossendale Local Plan timetable, with submission by Friday 8 May 2026 to MHCLG.
- 2.4.2 to approve updates to the Local Plan timetable as required
- 2.4.3 to approve, publish and submit the documents and statements as required for the statutory Gateways 1, 2 and 3
- 2.4.4 to commission, subject to the Local Plan budget, and approve all evidence base documents, reports and supporting data and analysis for publication and where appropriate consultation
- 2.4.5 to finalise, agree and publish the statutory ‘scoping stage’ consultation ahead of the Gateway 1 assessment (to be published before 30 October 2026)

3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION

- 3.1 Reforms to the plan-making system were introduced in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 and are being implemented through the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, which came into effect on 25 March 2026. The reforms introduced substantial changes to the local plan-making system to prepare plans within a 30-month timeframe. It is expected that Local Plans will progress more quickly, being shorter, clearer and digitally accessible and contain a vision for the area with measurable outcomes.
- 3.2 Cabinet agreed on 11 February 2026 that, if the bid for the Local Plan Implementation/New System Plan Fund be successful, authority to accept this be delegated to the Director of Economic Development and the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Lead members for Planning and Resources. MHCLG emailed on 25 March to confirm that Rossendale has been awarded £108,474.57 of New System Plan Funding (Local Plan Implementation Fund Grant Determination 2025-26: No 31/8293). As explained in the Cabinet Report, this funding was made available to authorities who will be progressing plans early in the new system and commit to publishing their Notice of Intention (NoI) to commence the Local Plan by 30 June 2026, with publication of the Gateway 1 self-assessment before 31 October 2026.
- 3.3 The Rossendale Local Plan (2019 to 2026) was adopted on 15 December 2021. As a result of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026, the Council is required to start work on a new Local Plan, publishing the NoI to commence before 31 December 2026 and the Gateway 1 assessment before 30 April 2027. Accepting this funding accelerates the timescale by six months.
- 3.4 As well as publishing a ‘formal notice of intention to commence local plan preparation’, there is a requirement to publish the local plan timetable. A scoping consultation will also be required. This scoping consultation will seek feedback on what the local plan should contain and how consultation and engagement will be undertaken. This needs to be undertaken ahead of publishing the Gateway 1 self-assessment. It should also be noted that we are awaiting the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which is due to be published in June. This will shape the scope and content of the new Local Plan.

4. DETAILS

Formal Notice to Commence Local Plan Making

- 4.1 The notice to commence plan making marks the formal start to the preparation of a new local plan for Rossendale. The regulations require that the Council publishes a formal notice to commence plan-making. This will give communities and other stakeholders advanced notice of plan-making, so that they understand when and how they can get involved in the process.

- 4.2 In accordance with Regulation 19(1) and (2) the notice of intention to commence must contain the following:
- (a) *the name of the local planning authority who have prepared the notice,*
Rossendale Borough Council
 - (b) *the geographical area to which the local plan is to relate,*
The Rossendale Local Plan will cover the administrative area of the Borough of Rossendale
 - (c) *the title, if any, by which the local planning authority will refer to the local plan,*
To be confirmed - The Rossendale Local Plan
 - (d) *details of where the local planning authority's local plan timetable is published, and*
This will be published on the Council's website
 - (e) *the date on which the notice is made available under [paragraph \(1\)](#).*
The Notice will be made available before 30 June 2026

The Local Plan Timetable

- 4.3 There is a requirement to prepare and maintain a local plan timetable. The form, content, revision and publication of the timetable is set out in Part 2 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 (Regulations 4, 6 and 8).
- 4.4 The timetable must set out an overall timeframe of 30 months (following Gateway 1) for preparation of the local plan. The plan-making process includes a scoping consultation followed by two further consultations on the draft local plan prior to the examination stage. The timetable includes three gateway stages at key milestones which must be passed through successfully to progress to the next stage of plan making. The gateway stages include:
- **Gateway 1:** The first gateway is a self-assessment stage of readiness for plan making including details of project management, the timetable, approach to consultation and the proposed local plan scope. This must be published before 31 October 2026, and marks the start of the 30-month timetable for plan-making.
 - **Gateway 2:** The second gateway is undertaken following the first consultation on the draft local plan. An appointed planning inspector will assess the soundness of the Plan. This is expected to take place in September 2027.
 - **Gateway 3:** The third gateway is undertaken following consultation on the proposed local plan and includes a final assessment by a planning inspector prior to submission of the Plan for examination. This is expected to take place in September 2028.
- 4.5 It is expected that local plan timetables are kept up to date and not require full approval by Council each time they are updated. Delegated authority is sought for the Director of Economic Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to publish the local plan timetable and to agree subsequent updates to the timetable as appropriate.

Local Plan Scoping Consultation and Evidence Base work

- 4.6 Regulation 20 sets out a requirement to undertake a 'scoping consultation' with specific and general consultees which seeks feedback from stakeholders on how to engage with them through the plan making process and what the local plan should contain. This is a high-level consultation as part of 'getting ready for plan making' to inform the scope and content of the Local Plan and will not present policy options. This must be undertaken after giving notice of

the intention to commence and before passing through Gateway 1. It is intended that a 6-week consultation will be undertaken over the summer.

- 4.7 It is expected that a Call for Sites consultation will be undertaken at the same time, to help find land to meet the Borough's development needs, particularly for housing and employment.
- 4.8 Further work will be required on updating the Evidence Base to inform the Local Plan. Consideration will be given, where possible, to work with other local councils.

Gateway 1: the self-assessment summary

- 4.9 Gateway 1 is a self-assessment of readiness for local plan preparation. This must be undertaken before 31 October 2026. As set out in Regulation 21 the self-assessment summary must contain:
- (a) *The Local Plan timetable*
 - (b) *The local planning authority's (LPA) project management and governance arrangements for the preparation of the Local Plan*
 - (c) *The LPA's proposed approach to consultation and engagement in preparing the local plan*
 - (d) *The anticipated content of the local plan, and*
 - (e) *any obligation arising under Part 2 and Part 3 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.*

Post Gateway 1

- 4.10 Having passed through Gateway 1, the 30-month timetable will commence and the Council will be expected to undertake two further consultations and pass through Gateways 2 and 3, which will be assessed by an independent Planning Inspector, before formally submitting the Local Plan for examination by an independent Planning Inspector. This will be expected 24 months after Gateway 1. The final six months (from October 2028 to April 2029) will be for the independent examination and adoption by the local planning authority.

Local Plan Timetable

- 4.11 MHCLG has requested all authorities to complete a survey before Friday 8 May, providing dates for key milestones. The Council will need to publish the timetable on the same day as the Notice of Intention to commence plan-making, which will be expected soon after approval by Council. The timetable is set out in Appendix 1. It will need to be kept up-to-date.

5. RISK

- 5.1 A condition of the Local Plan Implementation funding requires the Council to publish the Notice of Intention to commence before 30 June and the Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October this year. The Council could be asked to return the funding (in the region of £108,000) and/or it may affect future funding for the Local Plan, if the deadlines are not met.
- 5.2 As the current Local Plan for Rossendale was adopted on 15 December 2021, the very latest that the Council could formally commence plan-making by publishing the Notice of Intention to commence is 31 December 2026, reaching Gateway 1 within four months (30 April 2027). This is a statutory requirement. Failure to meet these deadlines may result in government intervention, for which the Council would be financially responsible. The statutory

deadline is only 6-months later than this Report recommends in order to make use of the Government funding explained above in para 5.1.

- 5.3 It is imperative to keep the Local Plan up-to-date and maintain a 5-year housing land supply and meet the Housing Delivery Test as otherwise the Council will be at an increased risk of speculative development.

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)

- 6.1 There are costs associated with preparing a Local Plan, including evidence base studies, legal support, digital plan development, consultation and engagement, as well as the Examination. The Council's budget for 2026/27 has set money aside for the Local Plan review and in addition the Council has been awarded funding from MHCLG for Green Belt studies (£70,000) plus the recent £108,000 and money remaining from the Digital Transformation Fund, which is earmarked to help with GIS and Digital Services. It is anticipated that further funding may be made available as the new system progresses and LGR is implemented. Costs can be spread over the next few years.

7. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)

- 7.1 The Council has a statutory duty to press ahead with the Local Plan review. The recommendations in this Report will commit the Council to commence this 6-months earlier. In doing so the Council is able to make use of Government funding to help with the costs and other assistance from MHCLG and the Planning Advisory Service as a forerunner of the new system.

8. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This will be completed when a draft local plan is emerging.

9. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As the statutory development plan for Rossendale, the Local Plan continues to play a role in supporting the Valley Plan (the Corporate Plan for Rossendale).
- 9.2 The Lancashire Combined Authority is tasked with preparing a sub-regional Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) that will cover the whole of Lancashire. All the Local Plans being prepared will need to conform with the SDS but the Government and MHCLG in particular are aware of the different timescales. Initial work has commenced on this, led by officers from the current two unitary authorities (Blackburn with Darwen and Blackpool) and Lancashire County Council.

10. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Government is clear that local government re-organisation (LGR) should not delay the preparation of local plans. It is expected that the outcome of the Lancashire LGR consultation will be published in the coming months, which will be early in the local plan preparation. The new plan-making process requires regular updates to the timetable, so adjustments can be made as necessary.
- 10.2 Initial exploratory discussions are taking place across Pennine Lancashire about joint working and this could include a Joint Local Plan, subject to the new unitary authorities that will be established as a result of LGR.

10.3 Pendle BC and Hyndburn BC are both on a similar timeline as Rossendale BC. For different reasons they are required to commence and reach Gateway 1 before 31 October 2026, and have received the same funding from MHCLG.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Scheme of Delegation to accept the £108,474.57 of New System Plan Funding (Local Plan Implementation Fund Grant Determination 2025-26: No 31/8293) from MHCLG.

11.2 Appendix 1: Local Plan timetable – to follow

Appendix 1

KEY MILESTONES – Draft Timetable			
Make notice of intention to commence plan preparation		11 May 2026	Month -5
Next Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope and produce engagement strategy • Decide on project management arrangements (PID) • Internal/external briefings and engagement • Gather baseline info • Start on vision, land availability and evidence • Scope Environmental Report for SEA¹ 			
Scoping consultation <i>(how we will engage, what the plan should contain)</i>	start	15 June 2026	Month -4
Add Call for Sites consultation <i>(to identify sites for housing, employment etc)</i>	end	27 July 2026	Month -3
Publish Gateway 1 self-assessment		15 Oct 2026	Month 0
Next Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish summary of scoping consultation • Continue evidence base preparation² • Prepare draft vision • Propose aims and objectives • Consider potential development sites (site selection) • Identify spatial strategy options 			
Consult on proposed plan content and evidence – 6-week min <i>(the draft vision and aims/objectives, the proposed spatial strategy, evidence gathered and intended, possibly draft policies)</i>	start	15 May 2027	Month 7
	end	30 June 2027	Month 8
Actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarise main issues in responses received • How have had regard to the responses received 			
Gateway 2 – seek observations and advice from PINS <i>(4 to 6 weeks)</i>		Sept/Oct 2027	Month 11-12
Next Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish Gateway 2 observations and advice • Update plan as necessary • Decide on preferred spatial strategy • Decide on specific sites • Gather specific evidence to support allocations / policies and to demonstrate soundness 			

¹ Strategic Environmental Assessment - more detail to follow

² Retail/employment land reviews, SFRA, SHMA

Appendix 1

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Map local plan policies 			
Consult on the proposed local plan including: 8-week min <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed local plan Map of proposed local plan policies, site allocations and designations Details of the evidence gathered 	start	1 June 2028	Month 20
	end	30 July 2028	Month 21
Next Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish summary of main issues raised in responses received How has regard been made to responses received Finalise the plan Confirm that met prescribed requirements: legal compliance, have all the submission documents been prepared, ready to proceed to examination 			
Gateway 3 – check with PINS that ready to go to examination (prescribed requirements assessment) (4 to 6 weeks)		Sept/Oct 2028	Month 23-24
Submit plan for examination		31 October 2028	Month 24
Examination			
Examination recommendations published		March 2029	Month 29
Adopt the Local Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek full Council approval Publish Local Plan and Adoption Statement 		April 2029	Month 30
Publish the Policies Map (within 1 month of adoption)		May 2029	Month 31
Monitor Local Plan			