

A meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH)** will be held in **CIVIC SUITE, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN** on **WEDNESDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2023** at **7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

## **AGENDA**

### **APOLOGIES**

**1. MINUTES** (Pages 5 - 8)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) meeting held on 6th September 2023.

**Contact Officer: B Buddle**  
**01480 388008**

**2. RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**  
(Pages 9 - 10)

To note responses received to questions asked at previous meetings.

**Contact Officer: B Buddle**  
**01480 388008**

**3. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary and other interests in relation to any Agenda item.

**Contact Officer: B Buddle**  
**01480 388008**

**4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 11 - 22)

- a) The Panel are to receive and comment on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and current Notice of Key Executive Decisions.
- b) Members to discuss future planning of items for the Work Programme

**Contact Officer: B Buddle**  
**01480 388008**

**5. PLANNING SERVICES UPDATE (Pages 23 - 40)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the Planning Services Update Report.

*Executive Councillor: T Sanderson*

**Contact Officer: C Kerr  
07810 637540**

**6. PLACE STRATEGY UPDATE (Pages 41 - 48)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the approach and progress made so far by the Huntingdonshire Futures project in the six months following the adoption of the Place Strategy.

*Executive Councillor: S Conboy*

**Contact Officer: N Sloper  
01480 388635**

**7. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - AUTUMN UPDATE 2023-2024 (Pages 49 - 64)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to note progress on the Market Town's Programme Autumn update.

*Executive Councillor: S Wakeford*

**Contact Officer: P Scott  
01480 388486**

**8. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

To resolve:-

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**Contact Officer:**

**9. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME AUTUMN UPDATE 2023-2024 (PART 2)  
(Pages 65 - 74)**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the Market Towns Autumn Update Part Two Report.

*Executive Councillor: S Wakeford*

**Contact Officer: P Scott  
01480 388486**

26 day of September 2023

**Michelle Sacks**

Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service

**Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests.**

Further information on [Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and other Registerable and Non-Registerable Interests is available in the Council's Constitution](#)

**Filming, Photography and Recording (including Live Streaming) at Council Meetings**

This meeting will be filmed for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's YouTube site. The whole of the meeting will be filmed, except where there are confidential or exempt items. If you make a representation to the meeting you will be deemed to have consented to being filmed. By entering the meeting you are also consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If you have any queries regarding the streaming of Council meetings, please contact Democratic Services on 01480 388169.

The District Council also permits filming, recording and the taking of photographs at its meetings that are open to the public. Arrangements for these activities should operate in accordance with [guidelines](#) agreed by the Council.

**Please contact Mrs Beccy Buddle, Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny), Tel No. 01480 388008/e-mail [Beccy.Buddle@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Beccy.Buddle@huntingdonshire.gov.uk) if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Committee/Panel.**

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the [District Council's website](#).

**Emergency Procedure**

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

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## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PERFORMANCE AND GROWTH) held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 6 September 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor C M Gleadow – Chair.

Councillors A M Blackwell, I D Gardener, S A Howell, A R Jennings, R Martin, Dr M Pickering, N Wells and G J Welton.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors S J Corney, J E Harvey and R A Slade.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors S W Ferguson, B A Mickelburgh and T Sanderson.

### **21. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5th July 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **22. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor R Martin declared a Non-Registerable Interest under Minute 23/24 as Huntingdonshire District Councillor for Sawtry Ward.

### **23. NOTICE OF KEY EXECUTIVE DECISIONS**

The Panel received and noted the current Notice of Key Executive Decisions (a copy of which has been appended in the Minute Book) which has been prepared by the Executive Leader for the period 1st September 2023 to 31st December 2023.

### **24. SAWTRY VILLAGE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN EXAMINATION OUTCOME AND PROGRESSION TO REFERENDUM**

By means of a report by the Chief Planning Officer (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Sawtry Village Neighbourhood Plan Examination Outcome and Progression to Referendum Report was presented to the Panel.

The hard work of the Parish Council and those involved in the development of the Plan was praised by Councillor Martin, a sentiment which was echoed by the Executive Councillor.

Following questions from Councillor Gleadow, the Panel heard that a Conservation Statement had not been produced for Sawtry. However, it was noted that the Neighbourhood Plan policies do use the Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document which is to be used to inform planning decisions and guide

development proposals. The Panel further heard that due to not being able to contact landowners, it had been recommended by the Examiner to remove two portions of the land identified as recommended green spaces within the Plan.

Whereupon, it was thereby

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

## **25. FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24 QUARTER 1**

By means of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which was appended in the Minute Book) the Finance Performance Report Q1 was presented to the Panel.

It was clarified to the Panel, following a question from Councillor Jennings, that the interest rates within the report were based on current rates and would be adjusted throughout the year as appropriate.

Following a further question from Councillor Jennings, the Panel heard that conversations on the staff pay award were ongoing and that any reports within the media were speculative. However the Panel were assured that the current options being considered were affordable within the budget.

Councillor Jennings additionally queried a decrease in the expected income for additional green bins, the Panel heard that this was due a lower charge being made for the current year additional bin collection due to a reduction in the chargeable period, allowing for this to be brought in line with the subscription service due to be introduced in April 2024.

The Panel heard that there was confidence that timescales and funding would be achievable across the planned Market Towns Programme following a question from Councillor Gleadow.

Councillor Jennings inquired about the reduction in cash interest forecast within Table 4.2 as it was felt this contradicted the positive predictions across the report. The Officer confirmed that the detail would be sought and reported back to the Panel. It was also confirmed that PWLB loan maturity dates, taken to purchase commercial properties, would be added to this Table going forward.

The Panel were advised that whilst guarantees are not possible, the planned works to the properties within Fareham would maximise opportunities for yield, with potential tenants having expressed an interest in future rental already having been received.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Gardener, the Panel heard that work was ongoing to re-let the empty properties at the Rowley Centre in St Neots and that it was anticipated that marketing the two spaces together would generate greater interest.

Whereupon, it was thereby

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

**26. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24 QUARTER 1**

By means of a report and presentation by the Business Intelligence and Performance Manager (copies of which were appended in the Minute Book) the Corporate Performance Report Q1 was presented to the Panel.

It was observed by Councillor Gardener that some items were showing as a green status for the year when in actual fact they were currently under an amber status. It was explained that the current amber status was shown on the graphs and that the reason for the year end status showing as green was due to anticipated improvements over the year that would result in an overall green status. The Panel were advised that future reports would be revised to show both current and year end statuses in all summary tables.

Following an enquiry from Councillor Pickering on One Leisure admissions, the Panel was advised that full details of why performance was expected to partially recover by the end of March would be sought from the Portfolio Holder and reported back to the Panel.

Whilst the Panel praised the new format of the report, Councillor Jennings expressed concerns that in many cases the introductory commentary did not consider RAG status or performance into account, focusing on the positives and not the fuller picture. The Panel heard that this observation was noted and that this would be reviewed going forward with a possibility of merging the summary and detail sections to avoid unnecessary repetition. It was further observed by Councillor Gardener that the report layout was not as clear as the presentation previously shown to the Panel regarding the updates to the report style. Consideration would be given to amending the layout to reflect this feedback and the views of other stakeholders.

Councillor Martin enquired whether further detail could be provided regarding PI 15 to include detail on extensions to planning applications. The Panel were advised that this would be investigated and reported back to the Panel. Following a question from Councillor Gardener, it was noted that clarification would be given on PI 13 results and whether withdrawn applications were included.

The Panel were advised, following a query from Councillor Jennings, that the RAG status at year end would be reflective of the overall annual status where cumulative measures are used.

Whereupon, it was thereby

RESOLVED

that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be passed to Cabinet for their consideration when making a decision upon the recommendations contained within the report.

**27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

With the aid of a report by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was presented to the Panel.

Chair

**Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel – Questions requiring a response.**

<b>Minute No.</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>																								
23/25	Finance Performance Q1	Cllr Jennings	Enquiry surrounding the reduction in cash interest forecast within Table 4.2.	<p>Following an investigation it was found that the income budget for the CCLA property fund should be £162,000 (rather than £262,000), £100,000 has been misallocated from another budget. This will be corrected in time for the quarter 2 report. The budget last year was also £162,000, and is usually about this level. The result of which is there should be a £2,000 deficit not £102,000. Revised table for report below.</p> <p>Looking back over the last few years on the income received on this fund, and the income for Q1 2023/2024 is the highest for a quarter 1 over that period. The income is derived from the rents received on the portfolio of properties held by the CCLA fund (shared across the fund-holders), rather than related to interest rates, so will not necessarily track interest rate changes.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>Year</b></th> <th><b>Quarter 1 Income</b></th> <th><b>Full Year Income</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2023/24</td> <td>£43,320</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>£36,880</td> <td>£159,010</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>£37,050</td> <td>£146,630</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>£36,240</td> <td>£161,610</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20</td> <td>£42,810</td> <td>£168,920</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>£41,530</td> <td>£167,819</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017/18</td> <td>£31,300</td> <td>£177,020</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Quarter 1 Income</b>	<b>Full Year Income</b>	2023/24	£43,320		2022/23	£36,880	£159,010	2021/22	£37,050	£146,630	2020/21	£36,240	£161,610	2019/20	£42,810	£168,920	2018/19	£41,530	£167,819	2017/18	£31,300	£177,020
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23/26	Corporate Performance Q1	Cllr Martin	Query on whether PI 15 could include detail on extensions to planning applications.	Awaiting response
23/26	Corporate Performance Q1	Cllr Pickering	Clarification sought on how One Leisure performance was expected to partially recover by the end of March.	Awaiting response

## Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2023-24

<b>Performance and Growth Agenda Items</b>			
<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Pre-Scrutiny</b>	<b>Scrutiny Review</b>	<b>Task and Finish Groups Working Groups</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk Management Strategy</li> <li>• Performance Management Framework</li> <li>• Corporate Performance Report 2023/24 Q2</li> <li>• Finance Performance Report 2023/24 Q2</li> <li>• Treasury Management Six Months Performance Review</li> </ul>		
6 <sup>th</sup> December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23</li> <li>• Market Towns Programme – Winter Update</li> </ul>		
31 <sup>st</sup> January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final 2024/25 Budget and Medium - Term Financial Strategy (2025/26 to 2028/29) including Capital programme</li> <li>• 2024/25 Treasury Management, Capital and Investment Strategies</li> <li>• Financial Performance Report 2023/24 Q3</li> <li>• Corporate Performance Report 2023/24 Q3</li> </ul>		
6 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market Towns Programme – Spring Update</li> </ul>		
Unscheduled/Pending Further			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market Towns Programme</li> <li>• Business Development</li> </ul>

## Environment, Communities and Partnerships Agenda Items

Meeting Date	Pre-Scrutiny	Scrutiny Review	Task and Finish Groups Working Groups
2 <sup>nd</sup> November 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesign of Council Tax Support Scheme</li> <li>• Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garden Waste Subscription Service – Parish Council Engagement Update</li> <li>• Tree Planting on A14</li> </ul>	
7 <sup>th</sup> December 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non Domestic Rates Rural Settlements List</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Spaces Update</li> <li>• Flooding Management Update</li> </ul>	
4 <sup>th</sup> January 2024		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on Reducing the Carbon Impact of Council Facilities</li> <li>• Update on Alternative Land Management Scheme</li> </ul>	
1 <sup>st</sup> February 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy</li> </ul>		
Unscheduled		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GP Waiting Times</li> <li>• Issue of concrete affecting public buildings – specifically Hinchingsbrooke Hospital</li> <li>• Lack of NHS Dentists within the District</li> <li>• Corporate performance reports</li> <li>• Great Fen Project update</li> <li>• Romans Edge Lettings Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with Parish Councils and development of relationship</li> <li>• Hydrogen Vehicles</li> <li>• Environmental impacts on planning – renewable energy, green spaces</li> </ul>

## Task and Finish Groups

### Performance and Growth

#### Review of External Appointments to Outside Organisations

**Membership:** Cllrs S Cawley, S J Corney, I D Gardener and S A Howell

**Progress:**

**Summer 2022:** Terms of Reference have been established. Questionnaire has been sent to all relevant boards and organisations. Regular meetings are established from September.

**September 2022:** Evidence and information gathering underway.

**November 2022:** Information gathering completed.

**February 2023:** Report presented to O&S Panel and Cabinet

**March 2023:** Cabinet response to the report received by the Panel.

**July 2023:** Communication to be sent to all Councillors who are representatives on outside organisations to advise the new reporting progress.

**Next steps:** Plan to regularly review and monitor implementation of recommendations.

### Environment, Communities and Partnerships

#### Climate Working Group

**Members:** Cllrs T D Alban, J Kerr, C Lowe and D Shaw

**Lead Officer:** Neil Sloper

**Progress:**

**November 2022:** Initial Meetings held to establish Terms of Reference for the group.

**April 2023:** Regular meetings established. Evidence and information gathering to be progressed.

Group to be involved in the Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy Development.

**Next Steps:** Subgroup formed to develop the Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy.

Ongoing dialogue with the team to develop a proposed work plan.

**Climate Sub Group**  
**Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy**

**Members:** Cllrs T D Alban, J Kerr, C Lowe and D Shaw

**Lead Officer:** George McDowell

**Progress:**

**February 2022:** Initial meeting held

**May 2023:** Regular meetings established. Residents survey agreed.

**July 2023:** Meeting to review the outcome of the survey.

**September 2023:** Meeting planned to review applications for the EV pilot scheme

**Next Steps:** Final report anticipated for November 2023 cycle of meetings

**NOTICE OF EXECUTIVE KEY DECISIONS INCLUDING THOSE TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE**

**Prepared by:** Councillor Sarah Conboy, Executive Leader of the Council  
**Date of Publication:** 18 September 2023  
**For Period:** 1 October 2023 to 31 January 2024

Membership of the Cabinet is as follows:-

Councillor Details		Councillor Contact Details
Page 15 of 78	Councillor S J Conboy	Executive Leader of the Council and Executive Councillor for Place
		Cloudberry Cottage 9 Earning Street Godmanchester Huntingdon PE29 2JD  Tel: 01480 414900 / 07831 807208 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Sarah.Conboy@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Sarah.Conboy@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>
	Councillor L Davenport-Ray	Executive Councillor for Climate & Environment
		73 Hogsden Leys St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 6AD  E-mail: <a href="mailto:Lara.Davenport-Ray@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Lara.Davenport-Ray@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>
Councillor S Ferguson	Executive Councillor for Customer Services	9 Anderson Close St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 6DN  Tel: 07525 987460 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Stephen.Ferguson@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Stephen.Ferguson@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>

Councillor M Hassall	Executive Councillor for Corporate & Shared Services	Care of Huntingdonshire District Council St Mary's Street Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE29 3TN  Tel: 07825 193572 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Martin.Hassall@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Martin.Hassall@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>
Councillor B Mickelburgh	Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources	2 Grainger Avenue Godmanchester Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE29 2JT  Tel: 07441 392492 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Brett.Mickelburgh@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Brett.Mickelburgh@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>
Councillor B Pitt	Executive Councillor for Community & Health	17 Day Close St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 6DF  Tel: 07703 169273 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Ben.Pitt@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Ben.Pitt@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>
Councillor T Sanderson	Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Planning	29 Burmoor Close Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE29 6GE  Tel: 01480 436822 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Tom.Sanderson@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Tom.Sanderson@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>

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Councillor S Taylor	Executive Councillor for Leisure, Waste & Street Scene	66 Wren Walk Eynesbury St Neots Cambridgeshire PE19 2GE  Tel: 07858 032076 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Simone.Taylor@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Simone.Taylor@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>
Councillor S Wakeford	Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing	4 Croft Close Brampton Huntingdon Cambridgeshire PE28 4TJ  Tel: 07762 109210 E-mail: <a href="mailto:Sam.Wakeford@huntingdonshire.gov.uk">Sam.Wakeford@huntingdonshire.gov.uk</a>

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Notice is hereby given of:

- Key decisions that will be taken by the Cabinet (or other decision maker)
- Confidential or exempt executive decisions that will be taken in a meeting from which the public will be excluded (for whole or part).

Notice/agenda together with reports and supporting documents for each meeting will be published at least five working days before the date of the meeting. In order to enquire about the availability of documents and subject to any restrictions on their disclosure, copies may be requested by contacting the Democratic Services Team on 01480 388169 or E-mail [Democratic.Services@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Democratic.Services@huntingdonshire.gov.uk).

Agendas may be accessed electronically at the [District Council's website](#).

Formal notice is hereby given under The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 that, where indicated part of the meetings listed in this notice will be held in private because the agenda and reports for the meeting will contain confidential or exempt information under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended) and that the public interest in withholding the information outweighs the public interest in disclosing it. See the relevant paragraphs below.

Any person who wishes to make representations to the decision maker about a decision which is to be made or wishes to object to an item being considered in private may do so by emailing [Democratic.Services@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Democratic.Services@huntingdonshire.gov.uk) or by contacting the Democratic Services Team. If representations are received at least eight working days before the date of the meeting, they will be published with the agenda together with a statement of the District Council's response. Any representations received after this time will be verbally reported and considered at the meeting.

**Paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended) (Reason for the report to be considered in private)**

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the Financial and Business Affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information)
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations or contemplated consultations or negotiations in connection with any labour relations that are arising between the Authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of or office holders under the Authority
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings
6. Information which reveals that the Authority proposes:-
  - (a) To give under any announcement a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
  - (b) To make an Order or Direction under any enactment
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

Huntingdonshire District Council  
Pathfinder House  
St Mary's Street  
Huntingdon PE29 3TN.

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- Notes:-
- (i) Additions changes from the previous Forward Plan are annotated \*\*\*
  - (ii) Part II confidential items which will be considered in private are annotated ## and shown in italic.

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Reasons for the report to be considered in private (paragraph no.)	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Market Towns Programme - Autumn Update	Cabinet	17 Oct 2023		Pamela Scott, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager Tel No: 01480 388486 or email: Pamela.Scott@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		S Wakeford	Performance & Growth
Market Towns Programme - Autumn Update, Part II##***	Cabinet	17 Oct 2023		Pamela Scott, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager Tel No: 01480 388486 or email: Pamela.Scott@huntingdonshire.gov.uk	3	S Wakeford	Performance & Growth

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Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Reasons for the report to be considered in private (paragraph no.)	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Community Chest Grant Aid Awards 2023/24	Grants Panel	18 Oct 2023 15 Nov 2023 20 Dec 2023 17 Jan 2024		Claudia Deeth Tel No: (01480) 388233 or Email: Claudia.Deeth@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		B Pitt & M Hassall	Environment, Communities & Partnerships
Electric Vehicle Charge Strategy	Cabinet	14 Nov 2023		George McDowell, Parking Services Officer Tel No: 01480 388386 or email: George.McDowell@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		L Davenport-Ray	Environment, Communities & Partnerships

Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Reasons for the report to be considered in private (paragraph no.)	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Redesign of Council Tax Support Scheme	Cabinet	14 Nov 2023		Katie Kelly, Revenue and Benefits Manager Tel No: 01480 388388 or email: Katie.Kelly@huntingdonshire.gov.u		S Ferguson	Environment, Communities & Partnerships
Performance Management Framework***	Cabinet	14 Nov 2023		Emma Charter, Performance and Data Analyst Tel No. (01480) 388013 or email emma.charter@huntingdonshire.gov .uk		S Ferguson	Performance & Growth
Non-Domestic Rates Rural Settlements List	Cabinet	12 Dec 2023		Katie Kelly, Revenue and Benefits Manager Tel No: 01480 388388 or email: Katie.Kelly@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		S Ferguson	Environment, Communities & Partnerships

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Subject/Matter for Decision	Decision/ recommendation to be made by	Date decision to be taken	Documents Available	How relevant Officer can be contacted	Reasons for the report to be considered in private (paragraph no.)	Relevant Executive Councillor	Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Infrastructure Funding Statement	Cabinet	12 Dec 2023		Clara Kerr, Service Manager - Growth Tel no: 07810 637540 Email: clara.kerr@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		T Sanderson	Performance & Growth
Market Towns Programme - Winter Update	Cabinet	12 Dec 2023		Pamela Scott, Housing Strategy and Delivery Manager Tel No: 01480 388486 or email: Pamela.Scott@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		S Wakeford	Performance & Growth
Approval of Council Tax Base 2024/25	Cabinet, Chair of Corporate Governance and Section 151 Officer	15 Dec 2023		Katie Kelly, Revenue and Benefits Manager Tel No: 01480 388388 or email: Katie.Kelly@huntingdonshire.gov.uk		N Wells	Performance & Growth

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**Public**  
**Key Decision - No**

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Planning Services - Update

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth)  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Planning

**Report by:** Chief Planning Officer

**Wards affected:** All

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### RECOMMENDATION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the Planning Services – Update from the Cabinet report attached.

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**Public**  
**Key Decision - No**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Planning Services - Update

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) –  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2023  
Cabinet – 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Planning

**Report by:** Chief Planning Officer

**Wards affected:** All Wards

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### **Executive Summary:**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 Strategic Growth and Development Management were merged back under one Planning Service, with a new Chief Planning Officer in post. This report presents an update on activity within planning services over the past sixteen months, until the end of August 2023. The primary focus of this report will be Development Management and the determination of planning applications, alongside an update on the Local Plan

A new Corporate Plan has been adopted and this report will identify the strategic role Planning plays across the 3 pillars of 'Do, Enable, Influence'

Prior to April 2022 it was recognised that Development Management was experiencing a high turnover of staff, placing an increasing reliance on external contractors. An outcome of that was increased budget pressures for the service, alongside an increasing backlog of planning applications and cessation of our pre-application service while existing staff were experiencing unsustainable workloads. The report aims to provide an update on the journey to date to reduce the backlog and establish a sustainable planning service through a programme of planning improvements and reduced reliance on external contractors. This journey is not complete but it is timely to share an up to date position statement of activity. In addition, this report will take the opportunity to provide an update across the services that make up Planning Services and provide an update on the progression of the update to the Local Plan 2036.

On the commencement of a new Planning Service, it was evident that the focus was on decision making, and time was required to formally identify the backlog of planning applications and establish a monitor and manage approach to older applications. Alongside a need to address a number of vacancies, placing undue pressures on budgets due to a reliance on agency staff.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 it was established that 329 planning applications and 271 tree related applications were over 26 weeks old. On the 28<sup>th</sup> August 2023 this was reduced to 157 planning applications, and 45 tree-related applications respectively. Alongside a clear focus to reduce the backlog, we have established a programme of planning improvements. The purpose of the programme is to ensure we establish an agile, deliverable and financially sustainable service for the residents and business of Huntingdonshire, reviewing procedures and processes to ensure an equitable service for all service users, with decisions being issued in a timely manner for all users. This will include exploring the role of digital opportunities to streamline processes.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023, Cabinet agreed to the preparation of a full update to the adopted Local Plan which will set out a plan for how the district will grow over future decades. A range of consultations took place between February -May 2023 and a 'Call for Sites' between March and June. Engagement events were undertaken with Members and Town and Parish Councils in May and June. On the 21<sup>st</sup> March Cabinet formally endorsed the Local Development Scheme, which sets out the key milestones in the preparation of the plan.

The Cabinet is

#### **RECOMMENDED**

- **to agree on the progress of improvements to the planning service to date.**
- **to note and agree the position on the progress of the update to the Local Plan**

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the work to date to erode a legacy backlog, minimise staff turnover and embed new ways of working to deliver a sustainable service across Planning services. It will set out the changes made to date, and progress as an outcome of those changes.
- 1.2 This report will also provide a broad overview across the wider Planning service, including and update on the progress of the Local Plan.

## 2. BACKGROUND & CURRENT POSITION

2.1 Prior to April 2022, planning matters were delivered under two separate approaches, Strategic Growth and Development Management. Strategic Growth reported to the Corporate Director (Place) and Development Management reported to the Chief Operating Officer. As of the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 the two teams were formally merged under one umbrella of Planning Services, reporting direct to the newly established role of Chief Planning Officer. The Chief Planning Officer reports directly to the Managing Director, while the post of Corporate Director (Place) remains vacant.

2.2 Strategic Growth comprises the following teams:

- Planning Policy (Plan-making; Neighbourhood Plans)
- Implementation (S106 monitoring; CIL; NSIP project management)
- Strategic Development in urban design ( large-scale planning applications/ 200 + homes)

Development Management comprises the following teams:

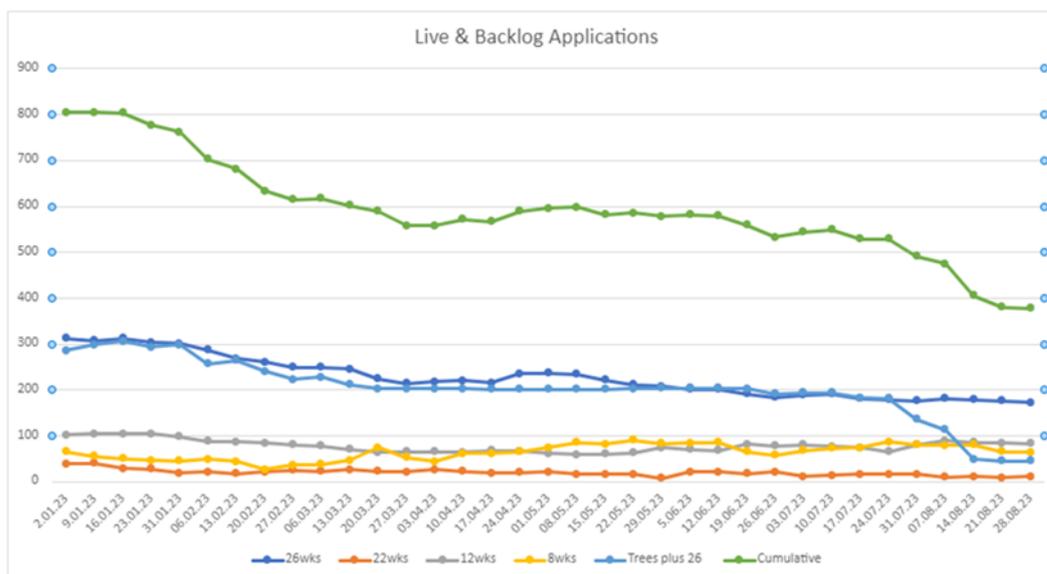
- 2 x Area DM teams ( extensions/ minors/major applications/up to 199 units)
- Planning Enforcement
- Planning Validation
- Environment Team ( Heritage/Landscape/Trees)

2.3 Under the newly established service it was evident that Development Management had been experiencing challenges of a period of high staff turnover, which placed a reliance on external contractors. For the avoidance of doubt, high staff turnover and the theme of reliance on contractors is not unique to Huntingdonshire District Council, it is a recognised industry-wide problem. An outcome of this period was a significant increase in budget pressures alongside increased workloads for existing staff. The focus had on decision making to ensure Huntingdonshire District Council met government targets and avoided becoming a 'Designated Authority' ([Improving planning performance: criteria for designation \(updated 2022\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) )and as a result establishing a proper record of legacy backlog applications was could not be accommodated within business as usual. In February 2022, our new Planning Service Manager (Development Management) was recruited, following a period of interim arrangements. In May 2022 our Development Management Area Team Leader (south) joined the service. In December

2022 our Development Management Team Leader (North) joined the service. By December 2022 all managers in planning services were permanent members of staff.

### Development Management/Planning Applications

2.4 Through Q1 and Q2 of 22/23 a systematic review of all planning applications in the system was undertaken, and risk profiled into categories according to age. The primary focus was applications over 26 weeks old, and establish those without an extension of time presenting a risk of fee-payback to the Council. Under the Planning Guarantee, the planning application fee must be refunded to applicants where no decision has been made within 26 weeks (unless a longer period has been agreed in writing between the applicant and the local planning authority). This only applies to applications submitted after 1 October 2013. Alongside that, all applications (backlog and live) have been categorised.



2.5 On the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 329 planning applications were over 26 weeks. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2023 218 were over 26 weeks old, a reduction of 34%. The ambition set is to have approximately 100 by year end. As of the end of August that has been reduced to 157, a reduction of 48%.

2.6 Alongside a significant erosion of the backlog of planning improvements the service has consistently maintained a high performance on decision making as demonstrated as part of wider Corporate Performance Monitoring reported to Cabinet on the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

2.5 While the primary focus is the backlog, it is equally important to embed sustainable new working practices. Working collaboratively with the Council's Transformation team a programme of planning improvements has been established. This will be formal programme that will examine our processes, procedures and ways of working to maximise efficiencies and minimise a risk of a further backlog. As part of that it is understanding the role of digital in that process. To date additional digital work has focussed

on unlocking further potential from existing IT systems. It was agreed that a programme of planning improvements would be formally set out and documented, and a programme manager has been engaged for one year to oversee that programme. They commenced with the authority in June 2023. A further update on the programme of planning improvements will be reported to a later committee.

- 2.6 As part of delivering a sustainable, self-sufficient planning service, the option for applicants to engage in pre-application discussions was re-established in October 2022. As part of a review of backlog applications, it was evident that the cause for a backlog was largely due to poor quality applications, that were required to be amended, and amendments not forthcoming. Amendments not only place undue pressures on officers, but increase financial cost to the authority. On the 4th October 2022, the Portfolio Holder for Planning issued a letter to all members confirming that the department would no longer accept amendments (with the exception of large-scale major applications) and the forum for discussion with officers was through our new established pre-application service (Appendix 1). While not to the satisfaction of all, this has led to improved quality of submissions, and more timely decision making. In accordance with the NPPF we will work proactively with applicants and that is through our pre-application system.
- 2.7 Between April 2022 – March 2023 2004 applications were received. 2002 were validated and 2223 were determined. These are applications of all types.
- 2.8 Between April 2022 – March 2023 37 complaints were submitted across planning services, with 10 proceeding to stage 2. (April 21-March 22 – 58 complaints submitted; 15 stage 2). Complaints represent 2.6% of the overall number of applications determined in the financial year 22-23.
- 2.9 Between April 2022 – 2023 – 3 Complaints investigated by the Local Government Ombudsman
- 2.10 in September 2023 one development management officer is commencing their planning apprenticeship to gain a planning qualification.

#### **Arboriculture/Trees:**

- 2.11 For works to be carried out to trees in a conservation area, or works to trees subject of a tree preservation order, an application must be submitted to the Local Planning Authority. In July 2022 our trees officer left the authority. The post was successfully recruited to, with the current officer starting with the authority in November 2021.
- 2.12 As of the 24<sup>th</sup> October 2022 329 tree related applications were outstanding. As of the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2023 this was reduced to 45 cases. This represents an 87% reduction in tree related applications.

### **Planning Enforcement:**

- 2.13 At the end of 2019 1467 planning enforcement cases were open. This has now been reduced to 652. Of that figure, 218 are deemed backlog. The remainder being cases on hand, and actioned in a priority approach based on level of harm, and wider public interest.
- 2.14 Planning enforcement have carried out training on the principles of planning enforcement with the Council's Development Management Committee. In addition, a presentation on the same theme was given to Parish Councils at the virtual engagement session on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022. That presentation was also given in person at the annual Parish Forum, at Burgess Hall on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

### **Programme of Planning Improvements:**

- 2.15 Since the commencement of the Programme Manager, the development of project management products has created key mechanisms to plan, manage and monitor the delivery of a portfolio of existing projects across phase 2 and 3.
- 2.16 This combined with the establishment of a change authority has ensured that any risks or issues identified within the service and consequently, the programme has been mitigated, so change requests escalated, approved so corrective action can be taken.
- 2.17 At the same, Business Analysts have begun process mapping the development management part of the service to identify possible areas for improvement, not only process but line of business applications, skills and knowledge of the workforce and management of time.
- 2.18 These findings will develop a new improvement plan for the next 12 – 18 months, with several options and recommendations that consider constraints observed in the service to date.

### **Local Plan Update:**

- 2.19 A Local Plan sets out a plan for future sustainable development in the district. It performs two specific roles:
- It identifies key areas of land for development to deliver the homes, jobs and services needed in the district, and
  - Includes policies against which all planning applications are considered.

The Local Plan is the document by which all development in the district is judged, it provides the basis for what can happen, where it can happen and when it can happen. It forms part of the Development Plan and all planning decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 2.20 Cabinet formally agreed to the commencement of an update to the Huntingdonshire Local Plan on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2023.
- 2.21 The following consultations were undertaken:
- Consultation on a Statement of Community Involvement ran 1<sup>st</sup> Feb- 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023
  - Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report ran from 1 February to 15 March 2023.
  - Land Availability Assessment Methodology ran from 29<sup>th</sup> March to 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023
  - Settlement Hierarchy Methodology ran from 29<sup>th</sup> March to 10<sup>th</sup> May
  - The Call for Sites ran from 29 March to 7 June 2023.
  - The Issues Engagement Papers consultations ran from 26 April to 5 July 2023.
- 2.22 The first phase of engagement on the Local Plan Update finished on 5<sup>th</sup> July. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report has been amended in the light of consultation responses and is available at [Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report \(huntingdonshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/SustainabilityAppraisalScopingReport). Consultation responses on the draft Settlement Hierarchy Methodology have resulted in substantial amendments to reduce and simplify the approach taken. The purpose of the document is also clarified through its revised title of Sustainability of Settlements Assessments. The Call for Sites generated over 350 submissions; these are now being assessed through the Land Availability Assessment Methodology which has benefitted from minor amendments arising from consultation responses received on this. The sites submitted include 12 in excess of 250ha each for new settlement or major employment proposals. The majority, however, are of 1 to 25 ha in size. Details of all sites received can be found at [Call for Sites - Huntingdonshire.gov.uk](https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/CallforSites) and includes an interactive map. Sites that meet the initial filters in the Land Availability Assessment will proceed to more detailed Sustainability Appraisal.
- 2.23 The Issues Papers were published for engagement in three formats. The Easy Read version received 267 responses of which 66% were from people under the age of 19. The Summary version only attracted 50 responses including 3 Parish Councils. Both included responses from registered consultees who took up these simpler options rather than responding to the full Issues Paper. As a result, responses to the full Issues Paper were dominated by professionals, interest groups and landowners with nearly 2,200 responses submitted.
- 2.24 A Local Plan briefing was held for all Members on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2023.
- 2.25 Town and Parish Council engagement included two hybrid meetings to explain the Issues engagements and respond to questions on this. These were held on 24<sup>th</sup> May and 5<sup>th</sup> June 2023. They were attended by 80 Councillors representing 34 Town and Parish Councils. However, these only resulted in responses being submitted by the following:

- Full Issues Paper – 11 Towns/Parishes
  - Summary Issues Paper – 4 Towns/Parishes
  - Easy Read Issues Survey - 1
- 2.26 Work is now ongoing to assess sites and prepare further issues and options for engagement in spring/ early summer 2024. This will include engagement with statutory duty to cooperate partners and site promoters and preparation of technical evidence to support the development of the Local Plan Update.
- 2.27 Updates to the Local Plan can be found on a dedicated web page [Local Plan Update - Huntingdonshire.gov.uk](https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/local-plan-update)
- 2.28 The Local Development Scheme was approved by Cabinet on the 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023. Table 2 sets out the broad timetable for the update to the Local Plan [Local Development Scheme \(huntingdonshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/local-development-scheme)

### **Neighbourhood Planning:**

- 2.29 The current adopted Development Plan includes a number of made neighbourhood Plans (NP) for the following towns/parishes:
- Buckden
  - Bury
  - Godmanchester
  - Grafham and Ellington
  - Great Gransden
  - Houghton and Wyton
  - Huntingdon
  - St. Neots
  - The Stukeleys
- 2.30 Activity underway includes:
- Sawtry – Cabinet accepted the recommended modifications to the plan. A referendum is expected in October and expected to be made at Full Council in December 2023
  - St Ives – Reg 14 final draft consultation scheduled for September with Submission expected in December 2023
  - Great Staughton – Reg 14 draft consultation scheduled for September/October
  - Others in preparation: Joint NP for Great and Little Gidding, Hamerton and Steeple Gidding and Winwick; Stilton, Glatton, Hemingford Abbots, Brington and Molesworth, Old Weston and Catworth.
  - SEA screening complete for Great Staughton NP.

### **Implementation:**

- 2.31 This element of the report will focus on the Community Infrastructure. On the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023 a spend allocation was presented to Cabinet for consideration. It was agreed that it is timely to review CIL governance in light of ambitions published under the Levelling Up Agenda. As part of that it is noted that the Community Infrastructure Levy is proposed to be

replaced by an Infrastructure Levy. It was anticipated that further advice would emerge from government but that has not been published within anticipated timescales. However, recognising the Council's recently adopted Corporate Plan to 2028, and the three pillars of 'Do, Enable, Influence' it is timely to review governance to support the ambitions of the Corporate Plan.

- 2.32 A project plan is being developed and a further update will be presented to a later meeting.

**Other activities within Planning:**

- 2.33 The purpose of this report is to primarily give an update on the improvements undertaken to date within Development Management, and to provide an update on the progress to the update to the Local Plan. In addition to the matters discussed above the department continues to work collaboratively with partners in strategic transport matters including East West Rail, bus matters, A141 outline business case and A428 matters, alongside the CPCAs Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, and the Huntingdonshire Transport strategy (CCC).

- 2.34 The team actively engage on strategic matters relating to (but not limited to) the Great Fen, Fens reservoir project liaison, Huntingdonshire Place Strategy; Natural Cambridgeshire Liaison, Biodiversity Net Gain and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

- 2.35 The Local Planning Authority has an obligation to maintain a 5 year housing land supply and a statutory duty to publish an Annual Monitoring report

- Part 1(housing) is anticipated to be published in October 2023
- Part 2 is expected to be published in December 2023

- 2.36 The Local Planning Authority has a statutory requirement to publish an Infrastructure Funding Statement annually. That will be published in December 2023.

**Agency Staff position:**

Strategic Growth:

- 2.37 In the previous two years there has been no spend on agency staff; No spend to date on agency staff for 23/24

Development Management:

- 2.38 In 21-22 – agency staff cost to the department £486K  
In 22-23 – agency staff cost to the department £243K  
In 23-24 ( to date) – agency staff have cost the department £41K

2.39 This is a fluid scenario alongside managing vacancies and the need to deliver an efficient service. It should be noted the use of agency staff is carefully considered, and where possible we look to find longer term solutions.

### **3. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY**

3.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

### **4. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

4.1 The key risks to the performance of the planning department can be summarised as:

- Upturn in staff turnover
- Inability to recruit in challenging times (industry wide)
- Reversal of 'no amendments' policy
- Low update of pre-application advice/ Planning performance agreements.
- Significant changes in national approach to plan-making without suitable transition arrangements (planning policy)
- Significant changes in approach to decision making without suitable transition arrangements.
- Delays to expected government announcements (CIL/IL)
- De-prioritisation of programme of planning improvements.
- Outcomes of appeal/court decisions that place extra procedural requirements on LPAs

### **5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

5.1 The timetable for the Local Plan has been published, as per the Local Development Scheme (Paragraph 2.20)

5.2 The programme of planning improvements has been formally stood up, with details set out at paragraphs 2.11 -2.14 of this report.

### **6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, (SEE CORPORATE PLAN)**

6.1 Improved Housing (24) – First Homes position statement

Forward Thinking Economic Growth (35) -Commence update to the Local Plan

Forward Thinking Economic Growth (39)- Influence delivery of strategic transport infrastructure inc. East West Rail, A428, A141 strategic outline business case.

Lowering our Carbon Emissions (44) – Review of the Local Plan.

Lowering our Carbon Emissions (51) – Contribute to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Delivering good quality, high value-for-money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations (58) - Undertake the Development Management Improvement programme to improve the performance of the planning service.

## **7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 As identified in this report resources to maintain and deliver an efficient planning service remain carefully monitored and form part of the consideration of for the programme of planning improvements, and future bids to the MTFS. Where possible officer will attempt to access government funding when it becomes available such as the planning skills delivery fund announced in July 2023 to support ongoing skills development of staff.

## **8. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Local Plan update provides the opportunity to make significant changes to the Council's response to the climate crisis and ecological emergency. The Local Plan is in the early stages in identifying the priorities of local residents, businesses and organisations towards these in terms of how planning can help to shape our approaches and require changes to how development impacts on both the built and natural environments. This is not only reflected in the standalone chapters of 'Responding to the climate crisis' and 'Protecting and enhancing the natural environment' but is woven throughout the document in issues such as 'the green economy' and 'water efficiency standards'.
- 8.2 Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, which includes the HLP2036 unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Full regard must be had to ministerial statements and any emerging statutory requirements including the Environment Act 2021, which come into force in November 2023.

## **9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

- 9.1 The planning department has been through significant change since April 2022 but, importantly, continues to do so to ensure a sustainable, agile and deliverable service for the residents and businesses of Huntingdonshire.
- 9.2 The programme of planning improvements meets the required key action under 'Undertake the Development Management Improvement programme to improve the performance of the planning service'.
- 9.3 The Huntingdonshire Local Plan will meet many of the Council's objectives. In particular it meets the required key action under 'improving housing provision' of 'commencing an update of the local plan'.

## 10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [HDC Cabinet - Tuesday, 24th January 2023](#)
- [HDC Cabinet - Tuesday 21st March 2023](#)
- [HDC Cabinet - Tuesday, 18th April 2023](#)
- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)
- [Corporate Plan and Performance - Huntingdonshire.gov.uk](#)
- [Local Plan Update - Huntingdonshire.gov.uk](#)
- [Improving planning performance: criteria for designation \(updated 2022\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

## CONTACT OFFICER

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4 October 2022

Huntingdonshire District Council  
For the Attention of: All Members

(By email: [members@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:members@huntingdonshire.gov.uk))

Dear Members

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING SERVICE**

Dear Members,

In late 2021 we had to pause our pre-application planning service to enable the team to focus on our statutory duty of determining applications across a variety of matters, including planning permission, matters relating to trees, listed buildings and discharge of conditions. In the year 21/22 the team issued over 3080 planning decisions, despite several staffing challenges resulting from healthy competition from neighbouring authorities. The purpose of this note is, I am pleased to say, that we are looking to re-starting the service and the anticipated start date is the 12<sup>th</sup> October.

We are very mindful that all Councils have budget challenges, and it is to be commercially minded, and explore opportunities to drive additional income where possible. Restarting our pre-application service provides such an opportunity. This will ensure we can invest in an agile, skilled, and flexible planning workforce, able to respond effectively to the needs of our residents and businesses through ensuring that planning applications are determined on time.

To ensure successful delivery of a pre-application service we need to make several changes. These changes will not only streamline our ways of working but allow us to set clear external expectations with the development industry, which in turn will give certainty as part of their project planning, particularly in these uncertain times.

As many of you will be aware, the challenge from the development industry is timely decision making. In the past, and while aiming to be helpful we have accepted amendments to planning applications which take applications beyond their statutory time frames, but the reality is that amendments are a significant contributor to delayed decision making. A key long- term change in our approach to planning applications is to no longer accept amendments to planning applications (with the exception of large-scale major schemes). Our statutory function is to determine planning applications as they are submitted, and with that in mind, and to drive efficiency we need to ensure that applicants and agents submit high quality applications. This approach gives certainty to applicants, stakeholders, and residents that applications will be determined in a timely manner. In addition, this will allow all interested parties to monitor applications online, without the need to approach officers, effectively freeing officer time to focus on determining planning applications. The route to discuss amendments and changes will be our pre-application service.

Our new pre-application service is route through which applicants and agents can seek an informal officer opinion their scheme. It can be as simple as exploring the principle of their scheme, through to detailed design and masterplanning. It is available for all types of application, from householder applications through to masterplanning of large-scale major sites, renewables etc. We will also offer specialist advice. This will be a paid for service, with costs and timescales clearly available on our website, and now include the ability for services to be paid for online.

In preparation for the restart of this service, one of the first steps we are taking is to push even harder to resolve and determine outstanding applications. To make this happen quickly, between today, Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> October and Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> October inclusive we are putting in place temporary measures on how we respond to enquiries from customers, and we are calling this a 'Planning Blitz'. We will continue to respond to urgent and essential matters, however, general contact with planning officers in the Development Management Area Teams, will be prioritised to enable the team to focus on processing and determining applications which may mean there will be a delay in responding or that a response will not be provided until after the close of this period.

This temporary change does not relate to Planning Enforcement. They continue to operate as normal, and any breaches of planning control should be reported to the Planning Enforcement Team. Customers will also receive normal service from the Strategic Team who deal with large scale major applications.

In the short term you may experience lobbying from agents/applicants with a view to amending applications, but the good news is that we would implement this alongside the new pre-application service. In the event you are lobbied your support would be welcomed to encourage people to seek officer advice through the appropriate channel, namely our new -pre-application service. In addition, your support for our Blitz week would be welcomed, namely managing external expectation in the event other look for a communication route through you.

For the avoidance of doubt the changes proposed will also be clearly communicated all, including Parish Councils as we will need them to ensure they respond to planning consultations within their 21-day consultation period. In addition, a notification will be attached to our website.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact Clara Kerr, our Chief Planning Officer, or Julie Ayre, our Planning Service Manager (Development Management)

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Tom Sanderson  
Deputy Executive Leader, and  
Executive Councillor for Planning**



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**Public**  
**Key Decision - No**

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>Title/Subject Matter:</b>	Huntingdonshire Place Strategy Update
<b>Meeting/Date:</b>	Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) 4 October 2023
<b>Executive Portfolio:</b>	Cllr Sarah Conboy, Executive Leader, Chair of The Cabinet and Executive Councillor for Place
<b>Report by:</b>	Neil Sloper, Assistant Director (Strategic Insights & Delivery)
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All

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### **Executive Summary:**

The report seeks comment from the Panel, reflecting the progress made so far, following the adoption of the shared Place Strategy for Huntingdonshire, known as Huntingdonshire Futures, which was approved by Council earlier this year.

### **Background**

Huntingdonshire Futures is a statement of shared aspirations for the future that seeks to improve the lives of all our residents, communities, and businesses. The project is bigger than the Council in isolation. By transforming the culture to embrace embedded partnership working, the project will help shape the future of Huntingdonshire over the next 20-30 years.

The Strategy document was the culmination of many months of engagement with residents, partners, elected representatives and other stakeholders to deliver a brighter future for Huntingdonshire via five journey themes; Pride in Place, Environment Innovation, Inclusive Economy, Health Embedded and Travel Transformed.

Huntingdonshire Futures aims to guide future strategy and policy developments and investment decisions by the Council and partners, enabling more effective delivery of integrated interventions that better serve the current and future needs of residents, communities, and businesses.

### **Progress since March 2023**

Since adoption, the project has moved into a new phase, aimed at delivering of Huntingdonshire Futures. Stakeholders have been encouraged to help form steering groups which will lead to action planning and project delivery.

The current project phase is concentrated on establishing effective steering groups for each journey theme, accompanied by a governance framework, moulded to each steering group's individual needs.

The Council's commitment to pro-actively work with partners and stakeholders throughout 2023/24 has resulted in a step-change of project resourcing, to help support these new ways of working.

A more detailed summary of progress can be found in Appendix 1.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to comment on the approach and progress made so far by the Huntingdonshire Futures project in the six months following the adoption of the Place Strategy. The Panel's input is welcomed, to help inform how the project may scale its activities, over the coming months.

## **Appendix 1: Summary of Progress**

### **Introduction and Background**

Huntingdonshire Futures (Huntingdonshire's Place Strategy) was co-created between June 2022 and March 2023 in collaboration with residents and others from across the district. Throughout the Summer and Autumn of 2022, the Council undertook an extensive programme of engagement, convening the space and enabling the district to set out its views about the future. This process helped to create the District's Place Strategy - Huntingdonshire Futures.

At the heart of this work, is the understanding of what is most important to residents, communities and stakeholders within our towns and rural areas and across Huntingdonshire. Therefore, this summary report sets out the progress and activity to date, since the Strategy was adopted at Full Council in March 2023.

### **Planning The Next Phase Of This Project- The Council's Role**

The Council has had to re-imagine the process needed, to enable the two-dimensional strategy to be brought to life and have the desired effect, that Huntingdonshire Futures was designed to do.

The original document as you have just read, was co-created by our residents, communities, partners and stakeholders, it was not HDC's strategy, but HDC did convene and enable to the space for this work to be created.

Careful thought has been applied to ensure that HDC do not lead this next phase of delivery.

HDC's has a defined role to play but this project is more than HDC – this is for the whole of Huntingdonshire and understanding how, by working together, this project can inspire people and shape how organisations can work differently together for greater effect, and to help create that brighter future for the district.

The questions we are asking ourselves, is how the Council can support the foundations of this work by enabling and influencing; to encourage partners to do more together, for the benefit our residents, communities and businesses.

### **What Tools Can We Use And How Will This Document Be Brought To Life?**

There are multiple tools and opportunities to help draw people into this work moving forward.

We know that this is a very bold and difficult piece of work to carry out, but it is also inspiring and innovative. We make no secret of the fact that Huntingdonshire Futures is about getting partners to work differently together for the benefit of the district.

We know there will be many opportunities to communicate what is being planned and eventually delivered, inc. the Council's role and the story of partners and stakeholders collaborating.

We will articulate the shift from Strategy to delivery, taking the opportunities around steering group meetings and workshops. There may also be strong opportunity around Huntingdonshire Day – There is aspiration to coincide a series of activities to celebrate the journey themes across the district with Huntingdonshire day on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – more will follow in our next update to the panel in March 2024.

## Resourcing

**What does the resourcing look like in this new phase of work for Huntingdonshire Futures.**

### **Internal Resource**

Much of the resource that supported the co-creation of the Place Strategy has been retained into this next phase of work. But as we have previously explained, this work is bigger than the Council and will not be led by HDC. The Council's internal project team remains in place, to support, enable and convene the space for partners to work closely together, in order to deliver Huntingdonshire Futures.

The project team is currently as follows:

Project Sponsor – Assistant Director for Strategic Insights & Delivery

Project Manager – Economic Development Officer

Communications – Strategic Communications Manager

Project Support – Executive Support

The process to support delivery will increase throughout this financial year. Given this fact, the Council have decided to recruit an additional full-time resource as a project support coordinator. This is the first, full time resource for this project since its inception.

This new role will act as an interface, between internal and external project stakeholders, journey working groups and senior officers to maintain and increase cadence where opportunities arise.

### **External Resource**

While we have retained both external consultants who work with the Council last year, the focus and purpose of each consultancy has changed.

**Prior and Partners** were the principal consultant, who helped design and help the Council to create the Place Strategy document, last year. Their role will be to act as a critical friend, advising the Council of national and where appropriate, international examples of work that may be relevant to the evolution of Huntingdonshire Futures.

**PRD** ran much of the local workshops and focus groups last year as part of the engagement strategy for Huntingdonshire Futures. The Council has retained PRD's substantive role but with a different focus. PRD, this time around, will initiate and help facilitate the mobilisation of each journey steering group. Enabling discussion and helping each of the groups develop their work, in preparation for the delivery of the first projects for Huntingdonshire Futures.

As the journey working groups become mobilised, a coalition of external partners and stakeholders will be recruited to each journey steering group. Two journey groups have started this process with three to follow later during the year. A timeline can be found in the accompanying presentation. Over time, each steering group will appoint a Chair and adopt its own terms of reference. Further updates to the panel will articulate what this progress looks like.

## Mobilisation Of Each Journey Steering Group

During an initial period and while each steering group form, we expect a series of milestones to be reached. We also expect that each group will behave individually, establish their own terms of reference and likely progress at different rates. But broadly, we expect that each group will go through a similar process prior to delivering Huntingdonshire Futures on behalf of their respective journey theme. The expected milestones are:

- Mobilisation
- Action Planning
- Idea Generation
- Engagement
- Reporting / Accountability

## Project Governance

Slide eight of the accompanying presentation deck illustrates the project's governance framework for the next phase of the project.

There are three categories that have been identified to help form a robust framework:

- Partners / Community
- District Council
- Political Oversight

It is essential for the Council's project team to engage systematically, via the governance framework to maintain project assurance.

## Progress To Date

There are five journey themes associated with Huntingdonshire Futures:

- Pride In Place
- Travel Transformed
- Environmental Innovation
- Inclusive Economy
- Health Embedded

Slide ten of the accompanying presentation deck explains the proposed timeline to support the mobilisation of each journey steering group. The approach for launching each of the respective groups at different times, is tactical and for the following reasons:

**Health Embedded** – *Many of the actors are known and engage regularly with the Council and it is for this reason that it was decided to launch Health Embedded in the Summer of 2023.*

**Inclusive Economy** – *The individuals who were keen to contribute into this group, wanted to start sooner rather than later and so we decided to help facilitate this energy by mobilising in the Summer of 2023*

**Environmental Innovation** – *This group is scheduled to launch to coincide with the Climate Conversation activity being held in November 2023*

***Travel Transformed*** – As there are ongoing pieces of work being undertaken by the lead authorities (County Council and the Combined Authority) it was decided to wait and launch with a current proposed date of April 2024

***Pride in Place*** – It was decided to mobilise this group as part of the Huntingdonshire Day programme of activities in April 2024

## **Active Journey Working Groups**

### **Health Embedded Journey Steering Group**

The steering group for the Journey theme of “Health Embedded” have met on three occasions since the first Inception Meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The group has seen attendance inc. the following organisations / sectors to date:

- North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust
- West Cambs Federation
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Living Sport
- Citizens Advice
- Cambridgeshire Acre
- Care Sector

The subject matter lead in these meetings is the Interim Corporate Director for People and each meeting has been facilitated by PRD and the HDC Project team.

The group have had some excellent discussions over the three meetings, they have reflected on the Journey theme and the four pathways which were created. Upon the advice of the subject matter lead, the group have focused on the wider determinants of health which has led the journey group to show a keen interest in the following two areas:

- Physical Activity
- Social Isolation and Loneliness

It is likely that the next steps for this group will be to ask a wider group of stakeholders to attend a workshop which will confirm or deny the two subjects which have been identified. We also expect that a longer list of activities will be suggested. This will form the basis and start of interventions that will become the first delivery projects for the Health Embedded workstream. A more developed plan is expected by the next update to this panel, expected in March 2024

### **Inclusive Economy Journey Steering Group**

The steering group for the Journey theme of “Inclusive Economy” have met on three occasions since the first Inception Meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2023. This smaller group has seen attendance from the following organisations to date:

- Shift Momentum / Inspire 2 Ignite

- Huntingdon BID
- Cambridges Regional College

The subject matter lead in these meetings is the Economic Development Manager and each meeting has been facilitated by PRD and the HDC Project team.

An interim Chair has been identified for this group and is expected to take up their position in October.

The group have had some interesting discussions over the three meetings as they have tried to articulate what an “Inclusive Economy” can be defined as. They have reflected on the Journey theme and the four pathways which were created. With the input of the subject matter lead, the group have focused on opportunities that provide Social Connection and including Nature.

As previously described, the action planning and delivery process is similar. And so it is likely that the next steps for this group will be to move towards an “opportunity event” in front of a wider group of stakeholders which will confirm or deny the subject identified. We expect this will lead to a longer list of activities to be suggested. This will form the basis and start of intervention/s that will become the first delivery projects for Huntingdonshire Futures for the Inclusive Economy workstream. A more developed plan is expected by the next update to this panel, expected in March 2024

### **What Else Have We Learned in the last six months?**

So far as we know, the Council is one of few Councils tacking such pioneering work – many Councils create a Place Strategy but do not necessarily focus on the delivery in the way that we are doing. The only example to date we have been informed about is St Louis Missouri. But the team are keen to hear from other Authorities who may have done what we are doing, sharing knowledge and best practice is an essential behaviour to help support this innovative, next phase of work.

Taking the lead from St Louis, Missouri, the success created from this project, started with the laying of strong foundations to enable their work. We have found our groups so far, to be initially cautious while mobilising. But this caution is a helpful sign which suggests that the Council’s project team needs to lend greater support to our journey working groups. It is essential that the foundations are strong and fit for purpose to enable our partners to be successful when delivering this work.

There could be additional roles / functions for the journey working groups to consider, aside from delivery. They could form an external voice, a “check and challenge” group to comment, support or challenge local and regional initiatives that affect Huntingdonshire.

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**Public**  
**Key Decision - Yes**

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Market Towns Programme – Autumn Update  
2023/2024

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth)  
4<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy &  
Housing

**Report by:** Regeneration & Housing Delivery Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### RECOMMENDATION

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to note progress on the Market Town's Programme quarterly update from the Cabinet report attached.

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**Public - Yes**  
**Key Decision - Yes**

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Market Towns Programme – Autumn Update 2023/2024

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth)  
Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Cabinet  
Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy & Housing

**Report by:** Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All wards.

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides the 2023/2024 Q2 update on the Market Towns Programme (MTP).

The MTP is funded through a combination of external funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC), Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and National Highways.

### RECOMMENDATION UPDATE

Cabinet is asked to:

Note progress on all the projects within the Market Towns Programme and specifically the following:

- The appointment of a contractor to deliver the St Neots Town Centre Improvements (Market Square and adjacent highways/junctions) and commencement of works in October 2023.
- Progression of the Priory Centre improvement project including the appointment of a multi-disciplinary team to develop proposals and support delivery.
- Commencement of delivery of the Huntingdon & St Ives works, including roll out of the Shop Front Improvement Grant scheme.
- Delivery of the Digital Information Screens project in Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives, and Ramsey.

### 1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on activity across the strands of the Market Town Programme, with specific regard to the progress of projects highlighted above.

## **2. UPDATE ON MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME**

### **ST NEOTS PROGRAMME:**

#### **Town Centre Improvements (Transport Projects)**

- 2.1 The Town Centre Improvements project is scheduled to begin delivery during October 2023. This follows the successful completion of the contractor procurement process carried out, utilising the Eastern Highways Framework, in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council. The successful tender was submitted by the contractor Eurovia, and we are now in the process of finalising contracts to enable the works to begin in October.
- 2.2 The most significant risk to this project was the impact of high levels of inflation on the construction cost and, consequently, the ability of the Council to deliver the scheme within our current resources. Considerable work was undertaken in developing the detailed designs and specifications with scheme partners and contractors to mitigate this risk.
- 2.3 This work, which included consulting with contractors during the design process, helped to ensure that the value of both tenders received were broadly in line with cost expectations, and resources available. At a time when construction inflation is having a significant impact on the delivery of major infrastructure projects across the country, this is a considerable achievement.
- 2.4 Now that the procurement process is complete, work is turning towards the contractors starting on site, preparation and phasing of works in the Market Square and adjacent highways or junctions, which are due to be improved. The start of the main works within the Market Square itself is scheduled for January. This will help to ensure that there will be minimal impact on Christmas celebrations, including the Christmas lights switch on, which is a very popular event in the town.
- 2.5 As part of this initiation stage, the implementation of the Project Communication Plan will be of critical importance. The Communication Plan will be used to inform and guide messaging to residents and businesses. This includes ensuring accurate and up to date information concerning the works is always available. For example, on a topic discussed in these quarterly reports previously, where trees are due to be replaced in the Market Square for safety reasons due to being incorrectly planted (and as CCC would have been obliged to do anyway, regardless of the improvements works). This will ensure that residents and others can be fully aware that the scheme will in fact result in the planting of a greater number and wider variety of trees (already at semi-mature stage) than are currently positioned in the Market Square, combined with biodiverse ground level planters that incorporate the square's distinctive monastic statues, to help address what would otherwise be entirely natural and reasonable concerns.
- 2.6 Of critical importance to the success of this project, the Council continues to work with Wendy Fair Markets Ltd and the Market traders to support

uninterrupted operation of the Market during the scheme works. Notably, this has included installing new power points during July, which can be used by the traders (and St Neots Town Council when managing their own events/activities), for the duration of the construction period.

- 2.7 Discussions are also underway with Wendy Fair Ltd regarding the Council potentially taking over management of the Charter Market and integrating its operation into the Council's wider Market management, which also includes St Ives and Huntingdon. Subject to a successful conclusion of these discussions, the Council may take a direct role in managing St Neots Charter Market, beyond the completion of the town centre improvements.

### **3. Priory Centre Improvement**

- 3.1 The Priory Centre serves as a Hub for community groups and cultural events. However, its facilities are dated, layout is inefficient, and the building orientation does not engage with its prime riverside setting. This project is focused on developing proposals and a delivery plan to reconfigure and improve the layout of the Priory Centre, investing in its facilities, creating a stronger link to the town centre, and establishing a connection to the riverfront.
- 3.2 Towards this end, the Council has recently contracted with AOC, a specialist in community and cultural facilities, to develop designs and proposals for the Priory Centre and to co-ordinate refurbishment works.
- 3.3 The work being undertaken by AOC is being carried out and organised utilising the RIBA plan of work, which organises the process of briefing, designing, and delivering a new or improved building. AOC have been commissioned to take the project from initial designs (RIBA stages 0 to 2), up to construction (stage 5). The project is currently at the concept design stage (stage 2).
- 3.4 The Council and AOC are working very closely with the sitting tenant for the Priory Centre, St Neots Town Council, on developing an improved facility which enhances the cultural activities provided in the town and improves the financial sustainability of the Priory Centre as a whole. This has included establishing a Building Delivery Group comprised of members from both organisations. We are also seeking to engage with Centre users and St Neots residents in the project's development and delivery as part of the communication plan for the project.
- 3.5 The project is funded from both Future High Street (FHSF) grant funding and the Community Infrastructure Levy. FHSF grant funding is conditional on all expenditure of this element being completed by March 2024. Consequently, the Council is seeking to deliver some initial improvements by this point. This may include both internal, for example, energy efficient measures and, subject to planning permission, external improvements. The full extent of the improvement works, however, will be phased over 2023/24 and 2024/25 with the detailed schedule of works to be confirmed.
- 3.6 It is not possible to undertake works of this scale without impacting on the Centre's operation. This may result in a significant period of closure to allow works to proceed as efficiently as possible. We will work with the Town Council to develop a mitigation plan to minimise the impact of these works and to provide

support to those with existing or regular facilities bookings to assist with identifying alternative facilities during the works period.

#### **4. St Neots CPCA Legacy funding (masterplan phase 1)**

- 4.1 Delivery of this sub programme includes several small to medium scale projects. This includes the development of a stage in the redeveloped Market Square, and a public art initiative for the town centre, both of which are being delivered in partnership with St Neots Town Council.
- 4.2 The Market Square stage is intended to provide a focal point for town centre events, including future Christmas lights switch-ons, in addition to providing a facility for other events throughout the year, which may include music and other cultural celebrations. The design of the stage is being developed through a separate commission to the main Market Square scheme, however, the Market Square technical designs have specifically considered and incorporated the necessary infrastructure for a new stage. This includes the positioning of the stage within the Square and access to electrical and other infrastructure.
- 4.3 A procurement process to appoint designers for this scheme is scheduled to commence in early October. We are aiming to finalise the designs and seek planning consent for the proposals by early Spring. The construction of the stage would be incorporated into the main Market Square improvement works and delivered by the contractor Eurovia.
- 4.4 The purpose of the public art project is to deliver one or more public art installations throughout the town centre.
- 4.5 The project will be delivered through a single tender process, managed by St Neots Town Council, to be commenced during the Autumn 2023. The timetable for delivery will be confirmed as part of this process. The resulting commission will be divided into three key deliverables, including:

- Research, engagement and development of themes and vision (including proposed medium of work)
- Design work
- Creation and installation

The Co-Retail project also forms part of this smaller programme of activity funded by the CPCA. This scheme is being delivered in partnership with a local Community Interest Company, which is designed to support social enterprises and the public good in the local area.

- 4.6 The Co-retail scheme will enable space within a local retail unit to be provided to start up retailers and independent traders so that their goods and produce can be brought in front of shoppers and help to support new and local entrepreneurs. The project is scheduled to begin in the Autumn 2023. The investment which is being provided will enable space within an existing retail unit to be redesigned to accommodate this unique use. This project will deliver tangible benefits in terms of supporting local entrepreneurs and driving economic growth.

- 4.7 The final project within this programme is the Digital Information Screen initiative. This is being delivered as part of wider program including Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey. Further information about this project is included under paragraph 4.1.

## **5. Huntingdon and St Ives funding allocation**

- 5.1 The Huntingdon and St Ives programme is funded from a CPCA funding allocation which was provided as part of the original Market Town Programme, but which was only recently allocated to projects in March 2023. Just over £800,000 is provided to projects which will deliver Shop Front Improvement Grants in both town centres, a new Community bandstand in St Ives, an expansion of Cromwell Museum and a Visitor Information Centre in Huntingdon and a highways improvement scheme at The Broadway in St Ives.
- 5.2 The Shop Front Grant scheme was launched during July 2023, generating a great deal of interest. By August, we have already approved four shop front grants across both St Ives and Huntingdon town centres. A further 7 grant applications are currently under consideration. The value of grants approved varies from £2,000 to £10,000. We expect that the scheme will deliver between 20 to 30 shop front grants in total. The grants and the improvements they encourage are an effective way in which to promote and enable physical improvements to both Huntingdon and St Ives town centres.
- 5.3 The Shop Front grant scheme is being delivered in partnership with Huntingdon BID, who are supporting applications in both St Ives and Huntingdon. We are also working with the BID on delivering a Visitor Information Centre (focused on the town centre and shopping). The Centre is being provided with the Huntingdon Commemoration Hall. Work is currently underway, and the Centre is scheduled to be completed during the early Autumn.
- 5.4 As reported previously we have also provided financial support to the community driven project to provide a new Bandstand within St Ives. This project was successfully completed during July.
- 5.5 We are also working with the Cromwell Museum and Huntingdon Town Council to deliver a major expansion of the Museum. This project may involve the acquisition of a currently disused building within Huntingdon town centre, a short distance from the existing Museum. Should this acquisition proceed, it would present an exciting opportunity to provide more exhibition and display space in addition to enhanced customer facilities. The new building, if acquired, would not replace the existing Museum, but would be treated as an extension of the Museum's offering.
- 5.6 Another project being delivered in partnership is the highway improvements scheme proposed for The Broadway in St Ives. This is a County Council driven project and will provide for improved pedestrian/cycle links and other highway enhancements in and around the shopping units at this location. Whilst an initial scheme design was developed for this project, further improvements are being made and once confirmed, the scheme construction is provisionally expected to commence in April 2024.

## **6. Digital Wayfinding**

- 6.1 Following consideration previously reported in these quarterly updates, the Digital Information Screen programme was reinitiated and is being delivered across all four main market towns in Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots and Ramsey. The objective of this scheme is to provide up to 8 digital screens in high footfall locations for the purpose of providing local information based on tourism, retail, culture, and heritage as well as practical information concerning events, facilities, and transport links.
- 6.2 The Council is working closely with local partners including Town Councils in all four areas, local community organisations and Huntingdon BID. This includes identifying the most appropriate locations for the screens and how best to link to and incorporate local branding and other initiatives including local town apps which have been developed in several locations. The Digital Information Screens will be updated and managed by local partners.
- 6.3 All development costs, including maintenance of the screens for a period of 5 years, will be funded wholly from the wider Market Towns Programme. At the end of this period, local partners can continue to operate the Digital Screens or alternatively opt for the removal of the screens should technology have advanced or for any other reason. The Council is undertaking a procurement exercise to confirm a contractor, responsible for delivering all aspects of this project. Following this appointment, expected during October 2023, work will begin on designing the systems to be used and planning project delivery, which we expect will take up to 12 months for full completion.

## **7. Smarter Towns**

- 7.1 The purpose of the Smarter Towns project is to develop a network of smart technology which can provide up-to-the-minute data on local conditions. This can include air quality or the capacity of local car parks for example. This project is being delivered in partnership with Connecting Cambridgeshire.
- 7.2 Communication routers, which local sensors (potentially owned and managed by a wide range of public organisations) have been installed in our larger Market towns and a network of sensors has been deployed, for example in relation to monitoring river levels, for the purpose of providing flood warnings. This project is due to conclude shortly, and we are in the process of installing the final initial sensors before the network is opened and promoted more widely to other public organisations.
- 7.3 As part of this final stage, the Council is focusing on deploying sensors to monitor air quality in typically high pollution areas, for example, close to major road networks. This data can then be utilised in several ways by both the Council and partners, in planning appropriate mitigation activities.
- 7.4 As part of a pilot scheme, we are also working with local Housing Associations to provide sensors which are capable of monitoring environmental conditions in local housing stock. This can be used as an early warning system concerning damp and fuel poverty, for example, where accommodation is not reaching appropriate levels of heat during Winter. Should these activities be considered successful, partners will be able to directly invest in low-cost sensors and continue to expand and access the smarter towns network.

## **8. Ramsey Produce Hub**

- 8.1 The Ramsey Market Produce Hub project has an allocation of £1.1 million of funding from the Local Growth Fund, in addition to a parallel project focused on public realm improvements of £300,000. The purpose of the Hub is to provide space within the Great Whyte area for new retail start-ups and independents to provide products and produce which can also generate footfall and business for existing shop keepers. We are working closely with the town council to ensure this objective can be realised as effectively as possible.
- 8.2 The proposed location for this facility would require the loss of up to 8 on street parking bays. To better understand car parking capacity, not only relating to this project but also the wider Vision for Ramsey, the Council has undertaken a car parking capacity study. A key excerpt of the conclusions set out in the report is included below:
- 8.3 *There is available spare capacity within the town centre but if some spaces are removed from the Town Square and the parking demand increases in line with expectations, people may have to park slightly further from the heart of the town centre than they currently do. Spaces could be retained in the centre for disabled parking or EV charging, but standard vehicles may have to relocate by a small distance. The available space is further to the north along Great Whyte or greater use of the spare capacity in the Mews Close short stay car park.*
- 8.4 Whilst the overall impact on parking according to this report is relatively low scale, it is important that we do consider this issue in the design and deliver of the Market Produce Hub and other projects in Ramsey town centre. This will be of particular importance in accommodating or adding to disabled parking and EV charging for example.
- 8.5 As noted in previous quarterly reports, a critical challenge to the Produce Hub scheme and the proposed location is the presence of the river culvert underneath. We have undertaken technical and engineering assessments which have confirmed that whilst the original concept is technically deliverable it would require significant civil engineering works which would impact on cost.
- 8.6 Consequently, we are considering alternative options for effectively delivering the original benefit in footfall, jobs and diversifying the shopping offer available in Ramsey town centre. Different approaches may include smaller more flexible spaces which could provide a 'shop in a box' concept, utilising structures which can be more easily relocated around town centre needs and activities.
- 8.7 A good example of this concept can be found at 'The Courtyard' in St Ives which provides a small space for startup and independent traders, some of whom are predominantly online, e.g., Etsy traders. This relatively new concept has been very successful and provides a great variety of retail and cultural choice. Whilst the setting is very different to Ramsey, we consider there are positive lessons to be learnt from 'The Courtyard' in how we plan and develop the Ramsey Produce Hub. An options appraisal has been commissioned and we will be working closely with local partners to review this and consider how to progress this project.
- 8.8 In terms of the public realm improvements, we are liaising closely with the County Council Highways Department and Ramsey Town Council to develop

proposals for this project. Any improvements delivered will be required to integrate and add value to the resulting 'Hub' in whichever form this is delivered.

- 8.9 Several improvements have been identified as part of this process, which we consider will not conflict with the 'Hub' scheme. This includes decluttering of the highways, and the creation of additional disabled parking bays to compensate for any loss due to the 'Hub' building itself.
  
- 8.10 We are also investigating partial pedestrianisation of the area proposed for the Hub, to support town centre activities such as the Saturday market, whilst ensuring access for deliveries to local shops where required as a priority. To simplify and streamline delivery of this scheme, we will be seeking to deliver this fully in partnership with the County Council and their current Highways contractor. A timetable for delivery has not yet been developed as this is subject to the development of an acceptable design, which can be consulted on, however, we are targeting early Summer 2024 for completion.

## 9. FINANCE UPDATE:

9.1 The overall sources of confirmed funding for the MTP are shown below in Table 1. All funding identified below has been secured and is subject to contractual obligations and must be spent within the agreed guidelines and allocations only.

**Table 1: Overall MTP funding sources and status**

<b>Market Towns Regeneration</b>				
<b>Funding sources</b>	<b>£ Grant secured</b>	<b>£ Spend to date</b>	<b>£ Grant balance</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>St Neots Regeneration</b>				
Future High Street Funds (MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) now DLUHC)	£3,748,815	£1,388,463.29	£2,360,351.71	Progress on spending commitment and activity is reported to DLUHC quarterly.
HDC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)	£4,829,943	£0	£4,829,943	As per HDC cabinet decision. Schemes which have a mixture of funding sources inc. CiL (Community Infrastructure Levy), will utilise time limited funds before CiL.
CPCA	£3,100,000	£0	£3,100,000	Funding has been reprofiled for spend during 2024/25 financial year.
National Highways	£3,493,218	£0	£3,493,218	Funding agreement finalised January 2023. Drawdown of funding from NH (National Highways) will be in three tranches, scheduled for December 2023, May 2024, and November 2024.

CPCA Masterplan phase 1 St Neots (post change control)	£260,000	0	£260,000	CPCA Board approval has been provided to carry forward remaining funds and allocated to revised project activities.
<b>St Neots Regeneration Sub-total</b>	£15,431,976	£1,388,463,29	£14,043,512.70	
<b>Huntingdon &amp; St Ives</b>				
CPCA Masterplans & Accelerated Funding (*post change control March 2023)	£802,150	£50,000	£752,150	<p>The funding programme was originally due to conclude by March 2022.</p> <p>CPCA Board have confirmed approval to rollover of previously unallocated funding of £802,150 from these funds into 2023/24 and 2024/25.</p> <p>The original total funding allocation was £3,000,000. This has been deducted from the 'total grant secured' as the majority of the original allocation has been completed or closed.</p> <p>However, £295,000 of the original £3M allocation, is still active, and reserved to public realm improvements in Ramsey and is listed below*.</p>
<b>Sub-total</b>	£802,150	£50,000	£752,150	
<b>Ramsey Great Whyte Revenue funding (supporting Market Produce / Retail Hub &amp; staffing costs)</b>				

UK Shared Prosperity Fund	£221,000	£8,498.46	£212,501.54	Funding confirmed. Expenditure profiled for spend into 2024/25.
<b>Sub-total</b>	£221,000	£8,498.46	£212,501.54	
<b>Ramsey Market Produce / Retail Hub</b>				
Local Growth Fund (CPCA)	£1,153,525	£7,843.50	£1,145,681.50	Funding awarded December 2022.
CPCA Masterplans & Accelerated Funding – original allocation (Ramsey Public Realm*)	£295,000*	£0	£295,000*	Expenditure profiled for completion by June 2024.
<b>Sub total</b>	£1,448,525	£7,843.53	£1,440,681.47	
<b>PROGRAMME TOTAL</b>	<b>£17,903,651</b>	<b>£1,454,805.28</b>	<b>£16,448,845.70</b>	

## 10. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

10.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section before the Cabinet considers it.

## 11. KEY IMPACTS/RISKS

11.1 There are several risks associated with delivering an ambitious programme of this size and complexity, the notable risks are:

### Budget management risk

11.2 The projects that sit within the MTP are at various stages and therefore, as work progresses to detailed level, cost reliability and accuracy increases, the level of risk is more certain. We will continue to review the individual projects' viability and programme impacts, identifying any areas of risk, as the scheme progresses. The construction industry has seen materials and labour costs significantly increase in cost over the past 18 months. Inflation continues to be high.

11.3 Therefore, as we move from design into delivery any decisions on proposed options will require agreement that they can be funded within the approved Market Towns programme budget. Mitigation: We will continue monitoring the programme funding profile and anticipated spending against budgets, updating to Cabinet quarterly. We will also seek to engage Contractors as part of an early-stage pre-procurement process to assess 'buildability' and a sense check of construction costs based on current market activity. The MTP team continue to

provide regular updates to funding bodies, briefing them on estimated costings, risks, issues, and inter-dependencies.

### **Programme Timescales risk**

- 11.4 This is an ambitious programme of delivery, with the funding for St Neots of £3.748m from the FHSF required to be spent by March 2024. In order to ensure this is achieved we are seeking to reallocate funds within the programme to those projects most capable of meeting this deadline. Any FHSF reallocated will be replaced by CiL allocation, for expenditure beyond the current financial year.
- 11.5 The CPCA funding of £3.1m also has a deadline of March 2024, however, a change control request to move these funds into the 2024/25 financial year, has been submitted to the CPCA and will be considered by the CPCA Board during September. CPCA recognise the strategic importance of this programme, and we do not anticipate any issues in CPCA accepting this request.
- 11.6 The MTP team continue to provide regular updates to funding bodies, briefing them on progress, risks, issues, and inter-dependencies.

### **Programme Resources risk**

- 11.7 The MTP requires different skills, expertise, and external technical support at various stages of project delivery. The programme itself has multiple projects which must be managed simultaneously identifying all interdependences across the programme. There is significant internal and external stakeholder management and detailed consultation with partners and resident/ business groups.
- 11.8 This could result in competing priorities across organisations that will require careful consideration. Mitigation: As part of the project, a detailed resources plan and communications strategy with stakeholders has been developed to ensure the management of expectations and information being shared promptly. The HDC's website is regularly updated with the progress across the core programme sites, more time is being invested in engaging stakeholders, a greater presence on social media and revamping of the newsletter.

### **Reputational Risk**

- 11.9 The MTP is a high priority for the Council, so monthly reporting, governance and timely decision-making are critical to ensure the programme is successfully delivered. Mitigation: The programme governance and reporting lines will be continually monitored to ensure that the key programme milestones are managed and achieved. A full MTP programme risk register is in place along with individual project risk registers. Given the size and complexity of the MTP it features on the Council's Strategic Risk register, along with the mitigating actions.

## **12. LINK TO CORPORATE PLAN 2022-2026**

- 12.1 The delivery of the MTP is aligned with the principles and key objectives of the HDC Corporate Plan which sets out the Council's objectives.

### **13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The Council, based on previously successful funding bids and Cabinet decisions, has entered into several grant agreements with associated delivery and outputs frameworks.
- 13.2 All Funding Agreements and contracts are subject to review by the HDC legal team and senior officers and members as appropriate. In the most recent quarter, a contract with National Highways was entered into concerning funding provision for the Market Square (transport projects) scheme. Over the next quarter it is anticipated that further Funding Agreements / Contracts may require legal review. This includes the Ramsey Market Produce Hall, for which we expect to receive a draft funding agreement before the end of the fiscal year.
- 13.3 There will be a requirement for ongoing legal input to support the further development of project options, this will include the Ramsey Market Produce Hall, Old Falcon Inn, and Priory Centre. Other areas include future land and property advice relating for example to leasehold acquisitions and may be required should there be any contractual disputes. Noting there are none currently within the programme.

### **14. EQUALITIES**

- 14.1 The Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 14.2 Good planning and effective regeneration can improve environments and opportunities for communities experiencing disadvantage. Planning which does not engage with or consider the needs of local communities is unlikely to improve their life chances and may further entrench area-based disadvantage.

### **15. ENVIRONMENTAL**

- 15.1 The Council has a duty to ensure we continue to promote an environmentally positive recovery in Huntingdonshire following the impacts of COVID 19. We also have a duty to deliver sustainable place making. In December 2021, the Council adopted a core set of environmental principles. In October 2022, the Council passed a Cost of Living and Climate Change motion that recognises that the current cost of living and climate crises require joint attention to support the wellbeing of residents and businesses. In February 2023 Council formally recognised the Climate Crisis and Ecological Emergency, adopted the Council's Climate Strategy underlining the organisations commitment to:

- setting a positive example through its actions to be a net carbon zero Council by 2040
- an enabler supporting action within our communities and across our partners
- an encourager to those that live, work, and visit Huntingdonshire to take climate action and reduce carbon emissions

15.2 The Council has direct control of only a tiny proportion of all the carbon emissions within Huntingdonshire, but we can adopt a key role to influence the district, demonstrating good practice whilst setting policies and strategies to influence businesses and communities to tackle climate change whilst enabling sustainable living and growth. These principles are embedded within the MTP.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Report to Cabinet (FHSF (Future High Street Fund)) 13th February 2020 can be found [here](#)

Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020 - EXEMPT

Report to Cabinet (Market Towns Accelerated Programme) 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 can be found [here](#)

Report to Cabinet (FHSF) 23<sup>rd</sup>. February 2021 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Spring 2022 Update to Cabinet, 17 March 2022 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Summer 2022 Update to Cabinet June 2022 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Autumn 2022 Update to Cabinet September 2022 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Winter 2022 Update to Cabinet December 2022 can be found [here](#)

Market Towns Programme Spring 2023 Update to Cabinet March 2023 can be found [here](#)

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