

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Call for Sites

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 21 March 2023

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Planning

Report by: Chief Planning Officer

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

Commencement of a Call for Sites engagement period is proposed to support the first stage of preparation of the Local Plan update. This report presents a Call for Sites form which will provide landowners, developers, agents, individuals and other interested parties with the opportunity to suggest sites for a wide variety of uses, and to indicate when they may be available. The Call for Sites form (online where possible), will ask specific questions to gather sufficiently detailed information on the suitability, availability and viability of proposed sites to allow for consistent and comparable assessments to be completed. The proposed Call for Sites form is set out in Appendix 1 and is supported by a short note summarising the information that people will be asked to submit including signposting to sources for elements such as map coordinates (Appendix 2).

The Call for Sites engagement is interconnected with the Land Availability Assessment Methodology presented in a separate report on this agenda. Together they form a key part of the evidence needed to prepare the next Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

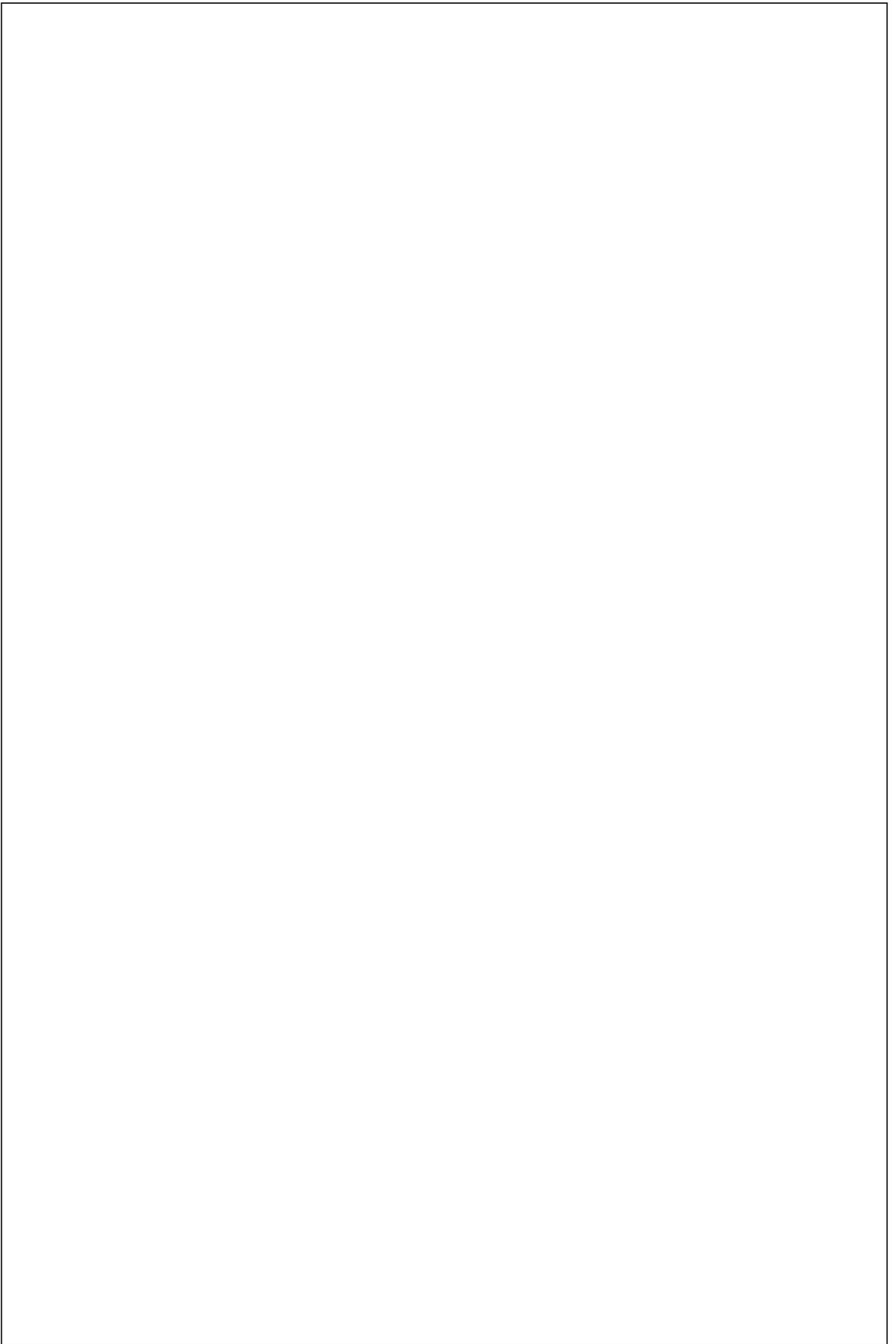
Agreement is sought to commence a Call for Sites to facilitate submission of proposed sites that have the potential to be allocated in a new Local Plan and to help local communities, landowners and their representatives shape the contents of the Local Plan update.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is

RECOMMENDED

- To approve the structure of the Call for Sites engagement
- To agree that the Call for Sites engagement period starts after this meeting and its call-in period and should last for 10 weeks.



1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the Call for Sites form, which will enable site promoters and landowners to propose potential sites for development and a wide range of other uses. The form will enable collection of consistent information to aid in the comparison of sites. This form is primarily designed to be submitted online through the [Planning Policy Consultation Portal](#) but a paper form as attached at Appendix 1 has also been prepared. This report asks that Cabinet approve the contents of the form and agree that a Call for Sites starts providing public engagement opportunities for ten weeks after this meeting and its call-in period.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY?

- 2.1 Paragraph 68 of the NPPF states that 'strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability....'
- 2.2 One of the main ways through which the Council can identify these sites is by initiating a 'Call for Sites'. This allows people to make the Council aware of their aspirations for land for uses ranging from new homes to green infrastructure. The local authority must ensure a consistent and appropriate approach to gather sufficiently detailed information on the suitability, availability and viability of proposed sites. It must also have a consistent methodology to assess all proposed or identified sites. Use of a structured form facilitates this. The identification of land availability forms a key part of the evidence shaping the next Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

3. CALL FOR SITES

- 3.1 To proactively seek potential land available for development or allocation in a Local Plan, a Call for Sites engagement period is proposed. This will be conducted by providing an online form for landowners, developers, agents, individuals and other interested parties to complete to let us know what sites are available and when. This will be the primary opportunity for sites to be proposed. A paper version of the form will be available on request for use by those who cannot access the online submission system.
- 3.2 Widespread engagement on the Call for Sites is vital to its success. It is proposed that all people and organisations on the [Planning Policy Consultation Portal](#) (approximately 3,400) will be notified. Planning and Communications colleagues will collaborate to promote the call for sites through a wide range of methods, including social media. Members may also be encouraged to facilitate publicity on this through their own networks to maximise awareness raising of the engagement opportunity.
- 3.3 The form that site promoters will be required to complete when submitting their site is attached as Appendix 1 of this Cabinet report. It should be noted that the majority of people will not see it in this format but in the

online version. This appears shorter and simpler as it includes dropdown boxes to aid accurate completion of information such as parish names and takes the user directly to the next relevant question depending on previous answers submitted. It is possible for people to partially complete the online form and save it to return to if they need to.

3.4 The form has been developed using the Local Government Association and Planning Advisory Service joint guidance on the effective delivery of strategic sites toolkit and by reviewing other Local Authorities' call for sites documentation.

3.5 In summary the Call for Sites form contains the following sections:

- Current land status - includes questions relating to the site's name, location, size, land type, current use and planning history
- Land ownership and legal status - includes questions on the promoter's relationship with the site, site ownership, land control arrangements, legal restrictions and site visit contact information
- Proposed land use and delivery - includes questions on the intended use of the site, when it will be available for development and how long the site will take to build
- Assessment of site and constraints - includes questions on access and servicing, constraints and how constraints may be overcome
- Further evidence - asks for any supporting information, surveys or assessments to be submitted alongside a completed form

3.6 The Call for Sites is supported by a short note (Appendix 2) summarising the information that people will be asked to submit to assist people unfamiliar with the process to understand the range and level of information they are asked to submit. This includes signposting to sources for elements such as map coordinates.

3.7 People and organisations will be able to submit sites for a wide range of potential land uses such as residential, employment, recreation, green infrastructure, community uses, flood mitigation and renewable energy generation. To meet national guidance for residential and employment uses, such sites should be capable of delivering 5 or more dwellings or for economic development purposes be of at least 0.25 hectares (or capable of delivering at least 500 square metres of floor space).

3.8 By including sites that are potentially suitable for diverse uses and development types, the Call for Sites provides the opportunity to identify a wide range of potential sites that will help to support viable, mixed and sustainable communities.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

4.1 The Panel discussed the Call For Sites at its meeting on 1st March 2023.

4.2 The Panel heard, in response to a question from Councillor Gardener, that in relation to flood mitigation measures, the Council would take a steer from the owners of land on what they would like it to be considered for.

Should the land owner put forward a site for a particular use it would be assessed for that use. The only instance when an alternative use may be considered on a site would be if for instance someone put forward a site for a particular commercial use and in consultation with Economic Development colleagues it is revealed that there would be a better market for a slightly different commercial use.

- 4.3 Councillor Blackwell enquired how resources would be managed and ensure that accurate data is recorded, the Panel heard that the Call for Sites form asks the landowners/site promoters to submit a lot of the data themselves, which will be checked to ensure the consistency of sources, in some cases extra information regarding the source of the data may be requested so that it can be double checked. In terms of resources site assessments will be done primarily within the team but it is hoped that the wider planning team could assist with some assessments, this will partly depend on the number of sites received.
- 4.4 Councillor Blackwell stated her concerns over the form itself, observing that it appeared difficult to navigate and uninviting, she expressed concern that small landowners would be put off. The Panel were assured that the online version of the form was a lot more user friendly and that guidance notes were provided to assist in its completion however a further check of the form would be undertaken prior to its publication. It was anticipated that many sites would be presented across the district, and that landowners have the options to seek professional support and guidance which in turn would help manage the teams resources.
- 4.5 Following questions from Councillors Gray and Pickering, the Panel were advised that this form could be used to submit all types of sites including green spaces and renewable energy. A plan was being developed with the Communications team to help maximise this message.
- 4.6 The Panel heard, following a question from Councillor Gardener, that policies in neighbourhood plans could not be used to assess the sites. This will be a planning policy 'off' assessment of sites, so the technical assessment of site will disregard both the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan. The submitted sites will be consulted on however later as part of a further issues and options consultation, giving the opportunity for communities to put representations in on the sites in their area, whether they support or object or suggest alternative uses. This would include parishes with Neighbourhood Plans. This may also identify desirable sites to parishes which had been unavailable at the time of their neighbourhood plan's creation and could then be included if they wished in a future update of their plan.
- 4.7 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for the Cabinet to make a decision on the recommendations.

5. CONSULTATION AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 5.1 Subject to agreement from Cabinet, the Call for Sites will be promoted for public engagement running for 10 weeks. The extended period is to maximise the level of promotion that can be carried out on it and allow plenty of time for people to identify site opportunities and submit the details sought to enable accurate assessment. The sites submitted will then be reviewed, compiled into a consolidated interactive map and assessed using the Land Availability Assessment Methodology.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 The Call for Sites form will assist in the delivery of the Council's objectives within the Corporate Plan (2022-2023):

- Tackling climate change and caring for the environment
- Enhancing employment opportunities and supporting businesses
- Supporting the needs of residents
- Improving the housing situation
- Strengthening our communities

- 6.2 Within the objective 'Improving the housing situation', the Call for Sites form specifically relates to key action 1: 'Commence an update of the Local Plan. This should ensure that local planning policies include a focus on sustainability of new developments, achieving the right mix of housing sizes, types and tenures to meet the needs of residents, the quality of the built environment, creating healthy spaces and communities, public transport and digital connectivity'.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 To be effective Local Plans need to be kept up to date. As set out in Regulation 10a of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating. Approval was received from Cabinet on 24th January 2023:

'To agree to the commencement of work to compile an updated local evidence base to inform and support preparation of the full update to the adopted Local Plan, working with partners and consultants as necessary'

- 7.2 The proposed Call for Sites is part of this process and will also ensure that the Council can evidence site allocation and development strategy decisions when the Local Plan is independently examined by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State.

8. SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Call for Sites is a key element of collecting sites not previously known to the Council. It seeks submission of sites for a variety of purposes

relevant to the environment and climate change including land for green infrastructure, renewable energy generation, biodiversity improvements and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- 8.2 The Call for Sites is the start of a process of identifying, assessing and appraising land to consider its future use. Submitted sites will initially be assessed through the Land Availability Assessment. It is proposed that those which are then demonstrated to be deliverable or developable for their proposed use will proceed to the more detailed Sustainability Appraisal. This will consider their contributions to and impacts on economic, social and environmental strands of sustainability to maximise the Local Plan's contribution to delivering a sustainable future for the district.
- 8.3 The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report approved for public consultation at HDC's Cabinet meeting on 24th January 2023 sets out a sustainability framework whereby a series of decision aiding questions have been devised in which to assess development strategy, sites and development management policy options and their alternatives. The outcomes of this will be presented in a Sustainability Appraisal document and cross referred to sites in the LAA.
- 8.4 Together the assessments/appraisals will help inform whether a site should be allocated in the next Huntingdonshire Local Plan.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 9.1 The Call for Sites is critical as a method by which to gather information on potential development opportunities across the district and to actively engage with site promoters and landowners. The Call for Sites will enable the Council to demonstrate that they are meeting the requirements as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance.

10. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Call for Sites Consultation Form
Appendix 2 – Call for Sites Summary of Requirements

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance: Housing and economic land availability assessment](#)
- [HDC Cabinet - Tuesday, 24th January 2023](#)
- [Local Government Association and Planning Advisory Service – Effective delivery of Strategic Sites](#)

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