

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

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Local Plan Issues Engagement Papers  
**Meeting/Date:** Cabinet – 18 April 2023  
**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Planning  
**Report by:** Chief Planning Officer  
**Ward(s) affected:** All Wards

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### **Executive Summary:**

This report presents the proposed Issues Engagement Paper for the Local Plan update as part of the continuing engagement opportunities on the initial phase of this project started in January 2023. The Issues Engagement Paper is a discursive document highlighting issues faced by Huntingdonshire and posing a series of questions to elicit opinions and priorities from local residents, communities, businesses and organisations to ensure that the future Local Plan represents and responds to the aspirations, needs and concerns of our local communities.

The engagement approach is explained which will cover a wide range of techniques with Planning and Communications colleagues collaborating to try to maximise the extent of awareness raising of the engagement opportunities. Engagement will cover include social media messaging, online documents and surveys and some face to face and remote meetings. A quick read version of the Issues Engagement Paper will provide engagement opportunities for young adults and those who might otherwise not engage.

Eight theme based chapters are summarised in the report. Each of these sets out issues that have been identified through the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy. Explanation of each issue is followed by questions intended to stimulate opinions and identify priorities to inform preparation of the Further Issues and Options engagement opportunities anticipated next year.

The eight theme based chapters are summarised below.

- Chapter 2 - Creating a vision and objectives
- Chapter 3 - Responding to the climate crisis
- Chapter 4 - Enhancing the natural environment
- Chapter 5 - Supporting our places
- Chapter 6 - Meeting housing needs for all
- Chapter 7 - Promoting a prosperous local economy

- Chapter 8 - Developing high quality sustainable communities with supporting infrastructure
- Chapter 9 - Distributing new growth

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet is

**RECOMMENDED**

- to approve the contents of the Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper, the Local Plan Issues Paper Summary and the Local Plan Issues Consultation - Easy Read documents; and
- to agree that the Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023, the Local Plan Issues Paper Summary and the Local Plan Issues Consultation - Easy Read documents can be published for public consultation for ten weeks after this meeting and its call-in period.

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose and content of the Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper (Appendix 1), the Local Plan Issues Summary Paper (Appendix 2) and the Local Plan Issues Easy Read Paper (Appendix 3). It asks that Cabinet approve the contents of these and agree that they can be published for public engagement for ten weeks after this meeting and its call-in period.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The processes for preparing a Local Plan are set out in the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#). They encourage extensive early participation through opportunities such as this Issues Engagement Paper. At least four major stages of public engagement are anticipated during preparation of the Local Plan update. these Issues Engagement Papers are the final part of the initial engagement and survey stage for 2023.
- 2.2 The Issues Engagement phase is a fundamental step in starting to prepare a new Local Plan for Huntingdonshire. It seeks to find out what local residents, communities, businesses and organisations think the priorities are for improving the district for future generations, meeting the needs for new homes and jobs, and how to reduce the impacts of the climate crisis and ecological emergency on the local area.
- 2.3 The papers look only at issues that will need to be thought about when preparing the next Local Plan. They are intended to be discursive papers to provoke thought, comment and opinions. They are shaped by exploration of the issues faced by the district as identified primarily through the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. They also reflect issues and engagement responses that have been identified through preparation of the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy. While they seek to bring forward discussion on a wide range of issues, they are not intended to prejudge the outcomes of any of them. The Issues engagement papers do not set out any form of draft policies or options.
- 2.4 All the responses made will be thoroughly considered and will be used to shape the next, more detailed phase of engagement. This will include further issues raised during this round of engagement and options for the approaches that might be taken in the future developing the Local Plan's approaches to guiding development. The Local Development Scheme (March 2023) anticipates that engagement will be held on further issues and options next year.

## **3. ENGAGEMENT APPROACH**

- 3.1 Planning Policy are working with the Communications Team to produce an engagement plan for the Issues Engagement Paper. This will include social media, articles in the Hunts Post local newspaper, direct communications with town and parish councils and posters for town and parishes to display to encourage engagement. Direct engagement events

will be arranged with Town and Parish Councils and duty to cooperate partners. These are in addition to direct communications through the planning policy engagement portal.

- 3.2 Engagement efforts for the Local Plan consultation stages will be designed to enable and empower local people to share their opinions and inform future policy options, in a manner that is accessible. Our engagement ideal is to be innovative in the way that engagement can take place, but simple in how it is accessed and promoted.
- 3.3 Social media posts will be focussed on highlighting single topics or questions or directing people to certain chapters of the issues paper based on their area of interest. This will also be undertaken for special interest groups for example the 'Promoting a Prosperous Local Economy' issue will be specifically highlighted when contacting businesses through our colleagues in Economic Development.
- 3.4 The Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023 (Appendix 1) covers many topics in depth. This is designed to gain a greater understanding of issues for those that are specialists in their field, including local residents who are passionate about specific topic areas for example climate change, or have time to focus on specific topic areas. It is not anticipated that people will comment on each chapter or issue within the Paper. The engagement portal is set up such that people can easily navigate to issues of particular interest and can answer as many or as few questions as they choose to.
- 3.5 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines that Local Plan documents should be shaped by "early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees. Our top priority is ensuring that local people, businesses and communities are well represented and have every opportunity to provide feedback during the engagement processes of the plan's creation.
- 3.6 It is important that the Local Plan's engagement processes are representative, inclusive, and effective. The completed Local Plan update will define how Huntingdonshire will look, and how people and businesses will live and operate within it for future years. As a document that will have widespread impact across the district our engagement objectives reflect a commitment to ensuring residents' voices are central to production and are able to be heard in an accessible manner.
- 3.7 To maximise accessibility for people to engage with the Local Plan Issues two shorter versions have been prepared in addition to the main Issues Engagement Paper. These will be used to try to gather opinions and input from people who might not ordinarily engage in the Local Plan making process.
- 3.8 Included as Appendix 2 is a Local Plan Issues Summary Paper. This highlights the key topics that we are seeking opinions on and poses one or two open questions on each. It contains a link to a survey form where

answers can be submitted and a link to the main Issues Engagement Paper if people wish to see particular topics in more detail.

- 3.9 Included as Appendix 3 is an Easy Read version of the Issues Paper. This introduces the main topics in a very short form. It is hoped that this will help us to engage with some seldom heard people, for instance those with learning difficulties or for whom reading English is challenging. This also contains links to a short survey with most questions just requiring a box to be ticked. Social media messaging will be used to share this along with targeted emails to known representative groups with requests to share the information more widely.

#### **4. ISSUES ENGAGEMENT PAPERS 2023**

- 4.1 The Issues Engagement Paper and the two shortened versions include an introduction setting out the engagement processes and context for preparing the Local Plan update. They then contain eight theme based chapters/ pages which aim to focus responses on different topic areas. The two shortened versions of the Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper each address a single Issue on a single page to aid clarity.

- 4.2 It should be noted that there are some topics, particularly health, which cut across many aspects and so are reflected in particular issues throughout. Examples of this are air pollution in relation to respiratory health, housing standards in relation to addressing the implications of both extreme cold and overheating and the protection and provision of green infrastructure to support people's physical and mental health and well-being.

- 4.3 The eight theme based chapters/ pages are summarised below.

- Chapter 2 - Creating a vision and objectives
- Chapter 3 - Responding to the climate crisis
- Chapter 4 - Enhancing the natural environment
- Chapter 5 - Supporting our places
- Chapter 6 - Meeting housing needs for all
- Chapter 7 - Promoting a prosperous local economy
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- 4.4 Chapter 2 (Page 12 of Appendix 1) enables people to shape the fundamental nature of the Local Plan by asking what the overarching vision and objectives should be for the Local Plan and the future growth of the district.

- 4.5 Chapter 3 (Page 13 to 27 of Appendix 1) specifically addresses issues in relation to the climate crisis. The chapter tackles issues such as carbon emissions and targets, carbon sequestration and offsetting, renewable and low carbon energy, energy efficiency and retrofitting, flooding, water supplies and water pollution and waste and recycling

- 4.6 Chapter 4 (Page 28 to 36 of Appendix 1) looks at issues relating to enhancing the natural environment. In particular, this seeks opinions on the importance of Huntingdonshire's landscapes, the natural environment and nature conservation designations, green infrastructure and how the Council can work towards biodiversity net gain and address air quality.
- 4.7 Chapter 5 (Page 37 to 52 of Appendix 1) looks at how the Local Plan could support our places. It provides a portrait of the district's market towns, villages, and the countryside asking people specific questions on what the priorities should be and what the issues are that could be addressed through a new Local Plan. Some additional questions are included that are place specific, for example, St Neots' relationship with Bedford and the opportunities this may present. Additional focus is also placed on the district's historic environment.
- 4.8 Chapter 6 (Page 53 to 65 of Appendix 1) addresses meeting housing need for all across our communities. The starting point for understanding how many homes are required to meet future growth begins with the Government's standard method calculation. Further information is provided on how this approach works and asks whether the district should look to provide more than the number of new homes arising from the standard method. The type and tenure of housing to be provided through a new Local Plan must also be considered and therefore specific issues have been identified relating to size, potential new requirements such as home working space and affordable housing typologies, accessible and adaptable homes, community led housing and self and custom build homes. Finally homes for specific groups are also addressed including for older people, service personnel, Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Show People and Boat Dwellers.
- 4.9 Chapter 7 (Page 66 to 81 of Appendix 1) focuses on what the Local Plan could do to promote a prosperous local economy. The chapter looks at how the district could work towards a greener economy and how it could support and diversify the local economy. Key sector requirements are also focussed on due to Huntingdonshire's access to strategic road networks and its rural nature including logistics and distribution, the rural economy and agriculture and tourism. Addressing the issue of retail and how town centres could be adapted to retain important leisure and service hubs within the district is also raised along with the role of tourism.
- 4.10 Chapter 8 (Page 82 to 97 of Appendix 1), 'Developing high quality sustainable communities with supporting infrastructure' looks at the infrastructure that is important to our local communities, what services could help to support healthy vibrant communities and how these could be included in new development. Topics include place-making and building design, open spaces, travel, public transport and active travel, parking, community facilities and services and utilities and digital infrastructure.
- 4.11 Chapter 9 (Page 98 to 100 of Appendix 1) is the last of the theme based issues chapters and looks at the issue of how growth could be distributed across the district. A strategy for how and where development should be located has not been established. Allowing the public to input ideas at this

early stage of plan-making will enable public opinion to feed into the development of a strategy, raise issues up-front and feed into future ideas and evidence to test the most appropriate way for the district to grow. The section therefore asks what growth scenarios should be considered for example: dispersed development, allocation of smaller sites across, all or the majority of settlements, continuing a similar development strategy approach to that set out in current Local Plan etc. It also asks people to consider what may constrain growth in different areas of the district and what mitigation or development requirements should the Plan prioritise, for instance, remediating flooding. This will enable the Council to prioritise specific development requirements if viability shows that not all measures can be implemented to help development to go ahead.

- 4.12 The final chapter 'Next steps' (Page 101 of Appendix 1) asks the public if there are any issues that we may have missed, or additional issues that people think that the Council should be considering. It also sets out how responses received through the engagement period will be used to help shape the next phase of preparation of the Local Plan update. This will lead to the next engagement opportunity which will cover further issues for people to express opinions on and raise any concerns about; it will also set out options for potential policies or policy topics to enable people to continue to shape the contents of the Local Plan update.
- 4.13 To assist with understanding the terms used in the Issues Engagement Paper there is also a glossary provided.

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

- 5.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be circulated ahead of the Cabinet's meeting.

## **6. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION & WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN**

- 6.1 Subject to approval, public engagement on the Issues Engagement Papers 2023 is proposed to run for ten weeks after this meeting and its call-in period.
- 6.2 At the close of the engagement period, the comments made will be assessed and used to shape the next stage of plan-making. The comments made will be summarised in the Council's Statement of Consultation and will help to inform the direction and priorities for the new Local Plan.

## **7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 7.1 The production of the Issues Engagement Papers aligns with the objective 'improving housing provision' as set out in the Corporate Plan 2022/23, a key action of which is:

“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.”

- 7.2 It also aligns with the objective ‘strengthening our communities’ through the key action of:

“Support community planning by providing advice to Towns and Parish Councils seeking to develop or update Neighbourhood Plans”.

- 7.3 The Issues Engagement Papers will ask residents, workers, organisations, businesses and others who have an interest in the district to identify what issues are important to them and how they think these should be addressed in the Local Plan. Categories and questions in the Issues Engagement Papers 2023 also address the corporate objectives of:

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

- 7.4 Consultation on the Issues Engagement Papers 2023 also adheres to the Corporate Plan’s central approach to develop ‘an enduring dialogue with residents, meaningfully engaging with them in the widest possible aspects of our work and listening and responding to concerns in shaping policies and priorities’. The consultation will allow people and organisations to feed into the early stage of Local Plan preparation and contribute towards a future strategy for the district.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 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 24<sup>th</sup> 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’

- 8.2 The processes for preparing a Local Plan are set out in the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#). They encourage extensive early participation through opportunities such as this Issues Engagement Papers.

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 To promote widespread accessibility of the engagement documents for the Local Plan Issues three versions have been prepared. This includes an Easy Read version to promote engagement with some seldom heard groups. The Local Plan update will be accompanied by an equalities impact assessment to ensure compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

## **10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The resource implications of preparing the Local Plan update are set out in the Local Development Scheme approved at the meeting of Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This emphasises that the process of preparing a Local Plan requires significant financial resources complemented by substantial time and staffing resources.

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

- 11.1 The Local Plan update provides the opportunity to make significant changes to the Council's response to the climate crisis and ecological emergency. The Issues Engagement Paper is the first stage 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'.

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

- 12.1 The Issues Engagement Paper is considered beneficial in enabling the new Local Plan to meet many of the Council's Corporate Plan objectives. In particular it meets the required key action under 'improving housing provision' of 'commencing an update of the local plan'.
- 12.2 Engagement on the draft Issues Engagement Paper also adheres to the Corporate Plan's central approach to develop 'an enduring dialogue with residents, meaningfully engaging with them in the widest possible aspects of our work and listening and responding to concerns in shaping policies and priorities.'
- 12.3 The engagement opportunities facilitated by the Issues Engagement Paper will allow people and organisations to contribute to the first stage of Local Plan preparation. The discursive nature of this paper and the questions posed is intended to ensure that the future Local Plan represents and responds to the aspirations, needs and concerns of our local communities.

### **13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Appendix 2 – Local Plan Issues Summary Paper

Appendix 3 – Local Plan Issues Consultation – Easy Read

### **14. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- [HDC Cabinet - Tuesday, 24th January 2023](#)
- [HDC Cabinet - Tuesday 21st March 2023](#)
- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)

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