

**UPDATE OF THE COUNCIL'S CORE STRATEGY –
ITS LOCAL PLAN
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet about the need for the Council to consider updating its Core Strategy - in order to provide Huntingdonshire with a suitably robust on-going local planning policy and development framework. Current emerging changes in the national planning policy position and within our local circumstances have effectively accelerated the need for the Council to pro-actively reconsider our local planning policy position.
- 1.2 The designation of the Alconbury Airfield Enterprise Zone triggers the requirement for the Council to consider undertaking a review of the District's Development Plan Documents. A review of our local planning policy position is therefore now considered to be necessary. It is anticipated that the undertaking of such an exercise, although potentially initially resource hungry, will leave the Council more appropriately placed to guide and accommodate the district's future sustainable growth needs.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Adopted Core Strategy 2009 sets out the Council's strategic planning and sustainable development strategies for the period up to 2026. The Core Strategy is the spatial expression of the Council's aspirations for the growth, conservation and environmental enhancement of the district. It is the primary planning policy document within the Local Development Framework - and as such it effectively constitutes the approved 'local plan' for our area.
- 2.2 Huntingdonshire is one of a minority of local planning authorities that have successfully managed to adopt a Core Strategy. In September 2010, in considering the potential implications of the then intended revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy, the Council also specifically reinforced its on-going commitment to the Core Strategy as the Council's primary planning policy document.
- 2.3 The emerging new National Planning Policy Framework, which will replace all existing national planning policy guidance, is likely to require all local planning authorities to look to revise their local planning policies and to update their local growth requirements. This revision will be required in order to address the fundamental changes in the local policy position which will be brought about by the significant reduction in national planning policy guidance.
- 2.4 The designation of the Alconbury Airfield Enterprise Zone also automatically triggers the need for the Council to consider revising and updating the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy. As Members will be aware Urban&Civic, the owners and potential developers of Alconbury airfield,

have also already commenced a consultation exercise regarding their intended development of the whole area within their ownership. This anticipates a substantial investment giving rise to the proposed creation of 8,000 new jobs, the building of up to 5,000 associated new dwellings, the potential provision of a new railway station (and other local transport improvements) and the delivery of a range of new educational and other community facilities. It is their stated intention to submit an outline planning application in the spring of 2012.

2.5 The Council would have had to consider updating the Core Strategy within relatively short timescales anyway - as additional housing and other sustainable growth requirements emerged – but this requirement has now been effectively accelerated by the committed and emerging proposals for the redevelopment of Alconbury airfield.

3. UPDATING THE EXISTING CORE STRATEGY

3.1 The Adopted Core Strategy was developed having regard to an extensive local and sub-regional evidence base. It remains an appropriately robust mechanism both to assess current planning and development proposals and to promote the positive sustainable growth of the District. Given this evidence base and the recent consideration and adoption of the Core Strategy this process of updating is not anticipated to materially alter the overall approach of the existing Core Strategy as there is no identified or justified basis for doing so. Instead it is presently contemplated that the existing Core Strategy will continue to be used as a sound basis for meeting our currently defined sustainable development needs.

3.2 Looking forward it is considered that the emerging National Planning Policy Framework will provide a streamlined context for developing a new local planning position. The Adopted Core Strategy is based on sound evidence of need for its scale and directions of growth. Therefore it is proposed that the Council should effectively maintain its support for them. The proposed local plan would need to develop a local strategy to incorporate the scale of new development envisaged for the extended period up to 2036. It is intended that this would be a comprehensive local plan that would incorporate both new local planning policies and identify development allocations.

3.3 It is considered that this approach of ‘retaining’ the development proposals contained within the Adopted Core Strategy would remove any uncertainty regarding the weight that could continue to be attached to the Council’s adopted ‘plan’. Any such uncertainty would have the clear potential to undermine prospective investment within the area, be challenged by interested parties and give rise to the promotion of a number of inappropriate and speculative alternative development proposals.

4. UPDATING THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

4.1 Planning for the district’s future needs would require an updating of the Council’s development strategy, for the period up to 2036, in order to be able to incorporate in a satisfactory and sustainable way the scale of additional new development that it is considered will need to be delivered.

4.2 That updated strategy for future growth would need to be based on sound evidence of the local need for additional economic growth, associated housing development and related infrastructure delivery; have regard to

the existing and potential environmental capacity of Huntingdonshire's market towns (to be able to sustainably accommodate any additional growth); and require the development of an associated local infrastructure strategy which could demonstrate how that growth could be satisfactorily accommodated. This updated local evidence base, sections of which will be produced in partnership with colleagues across Cambridgeshire and the LEP area, will effectively shape the plan going forward.

4.3 To ensure a robust strategy is in place to meet the current and future development needs of Huntingdonshire, and to ensure that a sound policy and delivery framework is in place to shape emerging major development proposals, the roll forward of the Core Strategy would need to be completed as early as possible in line with the applicable legislative and process requirements.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Therefore it is recommended that the Cabinet;

- a. Formally confirms the Council's intentions to review and update its Core Strategy in the manner set out in this report - and endorses the proposal for the Council to produce a new Local Plan in order to achieve this.
- b. In the interim, giving the on-going discernable growth demands on the area, maintains its support for the Adopted Core Strategy as a sound basis for making relevant planning decisions.
- c. Endorses the commencement of work, with partners as may be applicable, on compiling an updated local evidence base. That evidence base will identify what growth will be needed and how that additional growth could be appropriately and sustainably accommodated.
- d. Requires the Head of Planning Services to readily bring forward an updated Local Development Scheme (which will outline the timetable for preparing and delivering this new local plan).

Background Papers:

The Adopted Huntingdonshire Core Strategy 2009

The Draft National Planning Policy Framework CLG 2011

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