

A meeting of the **CABINET** will be held in the **CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN** on **TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2024** at **7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

## **AGENDA**

### **APOLOGIES**

**1. MINUTES** (Pages 5 - 12)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 12th November 2024.

**Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169**

**2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

To receive from Members declarations as to disclosable pecuniary, other registerable and non-registerable interests in relation to any Agenda item. See Notes below.

**Contact Officer: Democratic Services - (01480) 388169**

**3. AFFORDABLE HOUSING DELIVERY** (Pages 13 - 32)

To receive a report advising Members of the work undertaken by the Strategic Housing Team and to provide an update on the delivery of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire.

Executive Councillor: S Wakeford.

**Contact Officer: P Scott - (01480) 388486**

**4. MARKET TOWNS PROGRAMME - WINTER UPDATE** (Pages 33 - 50)

To receive an update on activity across all strands of the Market Town Programme.

Executive Councillor: S Wakeford.

**Contact Officer: P Scott - (01480) 388486**

**5. BUSINESS RATES - RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST (Pages 51 - 62)**

To receive a report on Rural Rate Relief in accordance with s42(b) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended by The Local Government and Rating Act 1997.

Executive Councillor: S Ferguson.

**Contact Officer: K Kelly - (01480) 388151**

**6. HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP MINUTES (Pages 63 - 64)**

To receive the Minutes of the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group held on 15th November 2024.

Executive Councillor: S Taylor.

**Contact Officer: B Buddle - (01480) 388008**

2 day of December 2024

***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 Democratic Services, Tel No: (01480) 388169 / e-mail: Democratic.Services@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 Cabinet.**

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.

This page is intentionally left blank

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER/STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN on Tuesday, 12 November 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

Councillors L Davenport-Ray, S W Ferguson, J E Harvey, B A Mickelburgh, B M Pitt, T D Sanderson and S L Taylor.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S Wakeford.

### 44 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th October 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 45 MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor L Davenport-Ray declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest under Minute No. 24/46 by virtue of owning a second property within the District and vacated the room during discussion on this item.

The Chief Executive, Mrs M Sacks, declared an interest under Minute No. 24/46 by virtue of owning a second property within the District. Although not a decision maker, the interest was declared for transparency purposes.

### 46 COUNCIL TAX PREMIUMS

*See Minute No. 24/45 – Members' Interests.*

*At 7:03pm, Councillor L Davenport-Ray vacated the room for this item.*

Consideration was given to a report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) proposing the implementation of additional Council Tax Premiums in relation to unoccupied properties across the District.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance reported upon the 2021 Census figures which had identified that there were 1.5 million vacant dwellings in England which was not that dissimilar to the figures reported for those on the social housing waiting list nationally. The proposals being considered by the Cabinet would help to take steps towards resolving the housing crisis by bringing more properties into use for social housing. It was acknowledged that reduced supply and a shortage of housing was driving up rents and housing prices making it difficult for residents to afford their own homes. In noting that around 600-700 homes remained vacant in Huntingdonshire, it was reported that the Council Tax Premium would be

introduced for empty and unfurnished homes after 1 year, rather than the current 2 year period and a premium would also be introduced for those with second homes. Both premiums would be charged at 100% coming into effect from April 2026.

Attention was then drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) where discussion had taken place at their meeting on 7th November 2024 on exemptions for the empty homes premium. The Panel had been offered the opportunity to form a Working Group to discuss the matter further following the release of legislation from the Government which was welcomed by the Cabinet. Executive Members also expressed support for the Panel's proposed additional recommendation requesting an update of the numbers of the properties falling under the scheme to be reported back to the democratic cycle once the new policy had been in place for 12 months.

Matters that were discussed included the timing of the proposals and whether the premium for empty homes should be introduced in April 2025 as opposed to April 2026 and the importance of clear communication and messaging out to residents to help distinguish between the two premiums. In respect of the former, the view was held that it would be better to wait for the legislation around exemptions to be released whilst also enabling residents longer to prepare for the changes.

Whereupon, it was

#### RESOLVED

that Council be recommended to:

- a) amend the existing empty homes premium to charge the additional 100% Council Tax premium after one year of the conditions being met, rather than the current two years, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026;
- b) approve the introduction of a second homes premium of 100% with effect from 1st April 2026;
- c) provide delegated authority for the Section 151 Officer, in conjunction with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, to adopt a policy setting out exceptions to the premiums in line with any regulations or guidance issued by Central Government, and to make subsequent updates to the policy as and when required; and
- d) agree that an update of the number of the properties falling under the scheme be reported back to the democratic cycle once the new policy has been in place for 12 months.

*At 7:12pm, Councillor L Davenport-Ray took her seat at the meeting.*

## **47 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2025/26**

A report by the Revenues and Benefits Manager was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the Council Tax Support Scheme in accordance with schedule 1a (5) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

By way of background, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance reported that since the scheme was revised in April 2024, the number of households receiving 100% support with their Council Tax had increased from 1,300 in March 2024 to 4,000 in August 2024. Furthermore, an additional 708 households now also received some support with their Council Tax since March 2024. The scheme had resulted in a significant reduction in administrative overheads which included 615 fewer reminders and 527 fewer court summons.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources commented upon the positive impact the scheme had upon the residents of Huntingdonshire and referred to the Community Health and Wealth Strategy which would further bring social equity to the benefit of the District's residents.

In response to a question raised by the Executive Councillor for Planning querying the impact of the scheme upon Town and Parish Council precepts, it was confirmed that the draft Council Tax Base would be circulated around to Town and Parish Councils at the end of November 2024.

In noting the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) and having expressed their support for the proposals, the Cabinet

### **RESOLVED**

to recommend to Council that the scheme principles for 2025/26 remain unchanged, ensuring that the scheme continues to deliver support to low income households across the District in line with the Corporate Priority to improve the quality of life for local people.

## **48 ONE LEISURE PV SOLAR INSTALLS**

With the aid of a report by the Facilities Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet gave consideration to a proposal to proceed with the project to install Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Panels at various One Leisure sites.

The Executive Councillor for Communities, Health and Leisure introduced the report, and in doing so, reported that the proposals had resulted from the core of the Climate Strategy work and the Council's quest to become net zero in carbon emissions by 2040. Whilst a number of challenges remained on this journey, including matters such as external funding and the development of new technologies, the proposals before Cabinet sought to reduce the Council's carbon emissions whilst also generating financial savings. The total project cost would be £412,000 with a payback period of 8.25 years. The funding for the project was proposed to be met from Council reserves.

Attention was then drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships), where particular mention was made of the variation in the payback period across all sites. A suggestion had been made by a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to utilise the funding for the St Ives site for battery storage across the three sites. The Cabinet concurred that this suggestion was not deemed suitable at the present time as it was felt that the current proposal generated a positive return for the Council. Additionally, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) had proposed an additional recommendation for consideration by the Cabinet relating to applying greater weight to tender applicants from within the District. The view was held that it would be difficult to redraft the Council's current procurement policy within the timeframes given and that it would be preferable to work with the supplier which had already been identified.

Matters that were discussed included the savings on utility costs to be achieved as a result of the project and the potential increases in electricity costs in future years. In concurring with the suggestion made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) for the Panel to see the progress of the project as it developed and after 12 months of implementation, it was

#### RESOLVED

that Cabinet

- (a) approve the project to be funded by the use of reserves, and the project to be added to the Council's capital programme to be delivered across the 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years; and
- (b) delegate the Director of Finance & Corporate Resources (Section 151), in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Finance & Resources to make any consequential amendments to budgets and release of necessary funds to deliver the project.

#### **49 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024-25 QUARTER 2**

With the aid of a report prepared by the Assistant Director (Strategic Insights and Delivery) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet received an update on delivery of the Corporate Plan during Quarter 2 of the 2024/25 financial year.

In introducing the report, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance drew attention to a number of performance indicators which were showing as red or amber. These were as a result of cyclical variations such as the drop in One Leisure admissions which was expected to peak again in the New Year, the time taken to process Disabled Facilities Grants, Council Tax collection rates and the number of days taken to process new claims for Housing Benefit. In respect of the number of households in temporary accommodation, the Cabinet were pleased to note that whilst the figures had risen in Quarter 1 they had dropped back down again in Quarter 2. Members were however mindful that this performance measure was largely outside of the Council's control. Mention was also made of the performance measures relating to the garden waste subscription service, composting levels, residual waste per



household and missed bin collections. In terms of the latter, the Cabinet were reminded that recent flooding events had meant that a number of bins were not able to be collected.

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene highlighted the benefits of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) being located within Pathfinder House which enabled effective collaborative working with the Council's Residents Advice Team. She then drew attention to the outreach sessions undertaken by the CAB every 4 weeks across the District. Having queried the "RAG" status of the action relating to future demand for Further Education provision in the St Neots area and development of the Local Skills Implementation Plan, the Chief Executive reported that a representative of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority would be delivering a presentation on skills at a forthcoming Informal Cabinet meeting. Additionally, the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance undertook to review the matter outside of the meeting.

Having received and noted the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) and in thanking Officers for their hard work and efforts in producing the report, it was

#### RESOLVED

that the Cabinet note the progress and performance made during Quarter 2, as summarised in the Corporate Performance Report attached and detailed in Appendices A and B of the report now submitted.

## **50 FINANCE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER 2**

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) presenting details of the Council's financial performance for 2024/25.

Members noted that at the end of Quarter 2, there was a revenue forecast underspend of £1,915,000 and a capital forecast underspend of £1,160,000. The reasons for this were as noted within the report. In terms of revenue, Cabinet Members were encouraged by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources to give consideration to the effective utilisation of the underspend, ensuring appropriate resources were directed to areas where there were pressures or increased business need. In respect of capital, it was reported that whilst it might be concerning when programmes were not delivered this was not unusual. Assurances were delivered that projects were given the appropriate level of scrutiny by Officers which was particularly important as the Council approached Quarter 3 when the Council would set the Minimum Revenue position which formed part of the annual budget setting process. Reference was then made to the collection of Council Tax, Business Rates and sundry debt, an area that was subject to review by Officers in ensuring that any monies owed to the Council were being collected.

The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) were presented by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources and in doing, so, comment was made upon the accidental savings that were being achieved as a result of vacancies in posts.

The Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources then went on to suggest an additional recommendation for consideration by the Cabinet in respect of the proposed contribution relating to the Community Wealth Fund. The Chief Executive reported that this was currently not included within the 2024/25 budget and to ensure due process, the matter should be referred on to Full Council on 11th December 2024 for consideration. Whereupon, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to consider and comment on the revenue financial performance for the financial year 2024/25 Quarter 2, as detailed in Appendix 1 and summarised in paragraph 3.2 of the report now submitted;
- (b) to consider and comment on the capital financial performance for 2024/25 Quarter 2, as detailed in Appendix 2 and summarised in paragraph 3.3 of the report now submitted; and
- (c) to refer the proposed contribution to the Community Wealth Fund on to Full Council on 11th December 2024.

#### **51 TREASURY MANAGEMENT 6 MONTH PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2024/25**

A report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Resources was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) updating Members on the Council's treasury management activity for the first 6 months of the year, including investment and borrowing activity and treasury performance.

The Financial and Treasury Accountant delivered an update to Members reporting that interest rates had fallen from 4.9% to 3% over the reporting period. Consequently, the Council's cash balances were holding up well. Updates were then delivered on borrowing, investing and the Liability Benchmark.

Having been presented with the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) by the Executive Councillor for Finance and Resources, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) to note the treasury management performance included in the Treasury Management 6 Month Performance Review, for the first 6 months of 2024/25; and
- (b) to recommend the report to Council for consideration.

*The meeting concluded at 7:53pm.*

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank

**Public**  
**Key Decision – Yes**

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

<b>Title:</b>	Affordable Housing Delivery
<b>Meeting/Date:</b>	Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) – 4th December 2024 Cabinet – 10th December 2024
<b>Executive Portfolio:</b>	Executive Councillor for Economy, Regeneration & Housing
<b>Report by:</b>	Pamela Scott - Regeneration & Housing Delivery Manager
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All

---

### **Executive Summary:**

This report is intended to advise members of the work undertaken by the Strategic Housing Team and to provide an update on the delivery of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire.

It will advise of the different workstreams within the team and how we support the ambition of Huntingdonshire Futures and the Corporate Plan. Specific areas covered in the report are:

- The delivery of affordable housing
- The role of Homes England
- Rural Housing
- Local Authority Housing Fund
- Longhurst Contract
- The new Housing Strategy 2025-2030
- Affordable Housing Advice Note, which is a Corporate Plan action.

### **Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet is:

### **RECOMMENDED**

To note the contents of the report and the appendix - The Affordable Housing Advice Note.

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

- 1.1 To advise members of the work undertaken by the Strategic Housing Team and to provide an update on the delivery of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 During 2023 several reports were brought to Cabinet on the subject of Affordable Housing, namely The Tenancy Strategy, First Homes Position Statement and the Mid Term Review of the Housing Strategy; more recently in July 2024 a paper was brought to Cabinet on the Local Authority Housing Fund, these reports are attached for reference.
- 2.2 This report aims to provide an overview of the service currently being delivered by the Strategic Housing Team, providing detail on how affordable housing is funded and the different mechanisms used to deliver homes.

## **3. DELIVERY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING – THE STRATEGIC HOUSING ROLE**

- 3.1 The Strategic Housing Team has established good working relationships with key Registered Providers (RP's) working in the district. Through these partnerships and working with Landowners and Housebuilders we are able to deliver affordable housing, meeting the need of applicants registered for housing.
- 3.2 Since 2020/2021 the Council has delivered a total of 1,885 homes, which includes the delivery of 703 homes last year which is the most the Council, working in partnership with RP's has delivered in one single year. Many of these homes are either funded through Homes England or as part of S106 negotiations on private development sites.
- 3.3 Our main developing RP partners are Longhurst, Accent, Orbit, Stonewater, BPHA and Cross Keys Homes. Places for People are the RP that owns and manages the former Huntingdonshire housing stock, for their new provision they are currently concentrating on redeveloping land in their ownership, for example garage sites, rather than actively sourcing new sites.
- 3.4 Historically, in terms of affordable housing we have also worked with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) when they were provided with grant from Central Government to deliver affordable housing in the region; whilst this is not the case at the present time we continue to work with them in a housing capacity through regional activity.
- 3.5 The Council has in recent years had a good record of delivering affordable housing and maintaining successful partnerships with RP's, in the main we are securing policy level (40%) affordable housing on eligible developments. In common with other Local Authorities, the exception to this is Growth Sites, due to major infrastructure requirements, for example

Alconbury Weald is currently providing 10-12% affordable housing whilst Wintringham is delivering 23.9%. For this year we are currently expecting the delivery of c 300 homes although caution should be exercised as sites can meet delays whilst others can deliver ahead of time, so this is subject to change. There is a healthy pipeline for 2025/2026 with a total of 341 homes already planned or started on site, with confirmed delivery through our liaison with planning on our growth sites.

### **Homes England**

- 3.6 Homes England is the UK Government's Housing Agency, responsible for increasing the supply of affordable housing, improving existing housing stock and supporting home ownership. It was established in 2018 and evolved from the Homes and Communities Agency, its key functions are 1/ Land Acquisition and Development, 2/ Affordable Housing Investment, 3/ Loan Programmes for Developers, 4/ Partnerships with Local Authorities.
- 3.7 The Council working with RP's and Homes England (HE) has enabled a very significant pipeline of affordable housing securing grant subsidy. S106 Homes are not eligible (if just 40% affordable housing is provided) for grant subsidy. HE takes the view that Local Authority policies should secure the affordable housing without recourse to grant, whereas grant can be secured if there is additionality above the percentage level secured through planning. On sites being delivered by RP's known as Land Led schemes, they are able to negotiate a grant figure based on the cost to deliver the scheme. In many case developments requiring 40% affordable housing have been secured to deliver 100% of the dwellings for affordable housing. On one site currently in development in Huntingdon a total of £15m grant has been secured to deliver 178 homes. Affordable housing is currently being delivered across the district including, St Neots, Huntingdon, St Ives, Bury and Upwood.
- 3.8 There has been recent coverage in the National press regarding difficulties that Local Authorities are experiencing in delivering homes as part of S106 sites, this relates to RP's being financially stretched or having costly obligations to improve housing stock. For HDC some of our RP's are Strategic Partners of HE and this status attracts grant investment upfront with flexibility on how the funding is spent across their development pipeline, rather than the traditional 50:50 split at start on site and completion. This has resulted in some of our partners preferring to divert resources to directly providing affordable housing on their sites rather than acquiring completed homes from developers / housebuilders. For HDC this is not yet a critical issue, whilst there have been instances of only a few RP's submitting offers to acquire S106 homes, with the teams influence we have been able to direct housebuilders to RP's that are able to agree terms. This is something we continue to monitor.

## **Rural Housing (Exception Sites)**

- 3.9 The Council enables rural housing to assist provision of affordable housing for those who have links with our villages. Policy LP28 in our Local Plan covers this:

*“A proposal for housing will be supported on a site well-related to a built-up area, as an exception to the requirements of relevant policies, where it can be demonstrated that:*

*a. at least 60% (net) of the site area is for affordable housing for people with a local connection;*

*b. the number, size, type and tenure of the affordable homes is justified by evidence that they would meet an identified need arising within the settlement or nearby small settlements (as defined in 'Small Settlements') through a local needs survey or other local needs evidence;*

*c. the remainder of the site area is available as open market housing or plots suitable for custom or self-build homes tailored to meet locally generated need; and*

*d. the amount of development and location of the proposal is sustainable in terms of:*

*i. availability of services and existing infrastructure;*

*ii. opportunities for users of the proposed development to travel by sustainable modes;*

*and*

*iii. effect on the character of the immediate locality and the settlement as a whole. Mechanisms, including planning conditions/ obligations, will be put in place to ensure that the affordable housing is delivered and remains affordable in perpetuity or for the appropriate period as applicable to the form of housing. To ensure that market housing and affordable housing elements are delivered concurrently a planning condition will be applied.*

- 3.10 The policy is intended to primarily provide rural housing for people with a connection to the village under consideration. The connection can be, by living in the village, having previously lived in the village, having close relatives living in the village or having an employment connection. It is essential that formal evidence of need is provided, and this should be by way of a local Housing Needs Survey. To ensure independence, the survey is carried out by Cambridgeshire ACRE, this survey is usually funded by the RP or Landowner. The Council will work with the Parish Council, RP, Landowner and other stakeholders. The affordable housing should occupy not less than 60% of the proposed net site area and the remainder will comprise market housing.

### **Enabling Role**

- 3.11 The wider enabling role goes beyond traditional housing activities, it involves understanding the relationship between planning and the economy and between regional and sub regional pressures. It must ensure that housing is integrated as a key component in wider Planning and Economic development and therefore the team supports our planning and economic development teams in a wide array of strategy work



including planning and transport policy, economic growth strategies within the Council and with partner Local Authorities and the Combined Authority.

- 3.12 The activity of the team supports the Corporate Plan and Huntingdonshire Futures Strategy as part of its place shaping role; the team falls within the Place Directorate which ensures strong leadership across Housing, Planning, Economic Development, Regeneration and Climate objectives.
- 3.13 At a Regional level the department is involved in the Housing Board for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and leads the Enablers forum. The team liaises with other departments in the Council and supports cross cutting activities
- 3.14 In terms of the current Local Plan, the main policies for affordable housing are:
- LP24 – Affordable housing provision, requiring for sites of 11 or more homes or exceeding an area of 1001m<sup>2</sup>, that 40% of the homes are provided as affordable housing,
  - LP25 – Housing Mix, addressing housing need, appropriate mix of housing, accessible and adaptable homes and custom build homes,
  - LP28 – Rural Exceptions Housing (see 3.9).
- 3.15 The Local Plan is currently under review, as part of this work we will support the Local Plans team to develop a Local Housing Needs Assessment, which will update previous Strategic Housing Market Assessment and the Housing Needs of Specific Groups Report by G L Hearn in October 2021.
- 3.16 On the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2024 the Deputy Prime Minister announced consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework and other aspects of the planning system including, the introduction of strategic planning, changes to fees and thresholds for National Strategic Infrastructure projects. The consultation closed on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2024. This consultation is borne out from the Government ambition to build 1.5m new homes over the next five years.

### **Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) Round 1,2,3**

- 3.17 As stated in the report to Cabinet in July 2024, the Council has been participating in Round 1 of the LAHF, which provided funding to local authorities to source funding for families in housing need who have come to the UK via Ukraine and Afghanistan resettlement and relocation schemes. HDC was awarded funding to deliver 21 homes under Round 1 and have been working with Stonewater Housing Group to acquire these properties. The Council has confirmed its agreement to participate with the Round 3 scheme which is concentrated on the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme, which requires the Council to acquire in partnership a total of four homes, of which one should be for temporary accommodation. We are currently contacting RP's to see who would be interested in working with the Council as Stonewater have advised that they do not intend to participate in Round 3.

## **Longhurst**

- 3.18 The Council has been in contract with Longhurst Housing Group to deliver a package of nine sites delivering c100 homes; permission was granted by the Council to dispose of these sites for the delivery of affordable housing. In the Spring of this year Longhurst approached the Council with a request to vary the terms of the contract to reflect the change in economic situation, we expect that this matter will be finalised in November 2024 and a submission of a planning application for the Station Road, Warboys site by March 2025.

## **Housing Strategy 2025 – 2030**

- 3.19 The current Housing Strategy ends in 2025, whilst the Council completed a mid term review of the current Housing Strategy in June 2023, please see attached link, it will be necessary to complete a new Housing Strategy next year. To support this activity work will commence in January 2025 to start to gather data and relevant documents to inform a draft of the strategy which can be consulted on with RP partners, other Local Authorities, Cambridgeshire County Council, the Combined Authority and other Stakeholders. This strategy will not only enable us to update our housing data for the district, including the type, size and tenure required but will also enable us to align the work with the Corporate Plan and Huntingdonshire Futures Pride In Place journey.

## **Affordable Housing Advice Note**

- 3.20 Members will note that the report includes an appendix known as the Affordable Housing Advice Note, this has been completed to support the activity of the team and to provide a consistent and transparent explanation on how affordable housing is delivered in Huntingdonshire.
- 3.21 The note provides a summary of HDC`s main requirements for new affordable housing provision on development sites in the District. The advisory note needs to be read in conjunction with planning policies stated in 3.14. It is hoped that this will provide further clarity on the policies contained within the Local Plan for Developers, RP`s and Landowners and strengthens advice on the type of enquiries received within planning and strategy teams.

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

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be circulated to the Cabinet in advance of the meeting.

## **5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 5.1 This report is for information only and to share with members the role of the Housing Strategy Team and how it delivers new affordable housing for Huntingdonshire.

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

- 6.1 The activity of the Strategic Housing Team supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan under the Priority of “In creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations” under the outcome of “Improving Housing”.

## **7. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Within the Health and Wellbeing Integrated Care Strategy, there is a priority of, “Reducing poverty through better housing, employment and skills” this report supports this Strategy.

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

- 8.1 In February 2023 the Council formally approved the Council’s Climate Strategy this recognises that the current cost of living and climate crisis require joint attention to support the wellbeing of residents and businesses. In passing the strategy the Council committed to not only delivering the strategy but also making decisions that wherever possible seek to contribute to positive and social benefits. The delivery of good quality, secure accommodation for residents supports this ambitions.

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

- 9.1 This report supports the delivery of action 18 and 20 of the Council’s Corporate Plan.

## **10. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Affordable Housing Advice Note

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Report Template for Cabinet / Committee Reports](#) – Local Authority Housing Fund July 2024

[Report Template for Cabinet / Committee Reports](#) – Tenancy Strategy July 2023

[Report Template for Cabinet / Committee Reports](#) – Mid Term Review Housing Strategy June 2023

[Report Template for Cabinet / Committee Reports](#) – First Homes Position Statement June 2023

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

Name/Job Title: Pamela Scott – Regeneration and Housing Delivery Manager  
Tel No: 07874 887465  
Email: [pamela.scott@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:pamela.scott@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank



# **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **Affordable Housing Advice Note**

November 2024

**Introduction**

This note provides a summary of HDC's main requirements for new affordable housing provision on development sites in the District, the purpose of which is to bring clarity and consistency for affordable housing within the area. This advisory note needs to be read in conjunction with:

- The adopted Local Plan (2019 - 2036) and relevant Neighbourhood Plans (and emerging new Local Plan)
- Huntingdonshire District Council's Housing Strategy 2021- 2025 (and emerging strategy 2025-2030)
- National Planning Policy
- National Described Design Standards (NDSS)

## **General Provision**

The Council expects developers and builders to take account of its policies, particularly those relating to the need for affordable housing, when acquiring land for housing development. The most relevant planning policies are LP24, LP25 and LP28 in the Council's Local Plan.

## **What is affordable housing?**

The National Planning Framework includes definitions of Affordable Housing. The Council sets out our definition as below:

“Affordable Housing can be Social Rented, Affordable Rented and or Intermediate tenures, (generally shared ownership), provided to eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Affordable housing should where permissible, include provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision”.

Affordable housing provision may include specialist or supported housing where an identified need exists. This may be in the form of m4(3) properties and bungalows to address physical disability or older persons needs and may also be accommodation to suit the needs of specialist groups.

In considering whether a development meets the threshold of 11 homes or 1,001m<sup>2</sup> residential floorspace or more for providing affordable housing, the Council will consider the net increase in dwellings, which takes into account any loss through demolition or conversion.

In terms of rented Affordable Housing, the Council's practice is currently to allow either Affordable or Social Rented provision and S106s are drafted accordingly. This is finalised on a site by site basis during the course of discussions with a specific housebuilder, Developer or Registered Provider. For both of these tenures the rent must not exceed the Local Housing Allowance (LHA).

However, a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is currently under consultation (September 2024) and suggests Local Authorities should form a view on the proportions of these two tenures. The Council will therefore consider whether its position may need to be reviewed once the new NPPF is finalised.

### **Level of Need for Affordable Housing**

The level of need for affordable housing is consistently high, the latest evidence from the G L Hearn report on The Housing Needs of Specific Groups confirms the priority need is for rented affordable housing.

We will seek affordable housing provision consistent with our Housing Strategy and Affordable Housing Provision as stated in the current Local Plan (LP 24).

A housing development will be required to provide a range of affordable housing types, sizes and tenures. The affordable housing provision may include specialist or supported housing where an identified need exists.

As LP24 states, a proposal will be supported where:

- a. it delivers a target of 40% affordable housing on a site where 11 homes or 1,001m<sup>2</sup> residential floorspace (gross internal area) or more are proposed;
- b. it provides approximately 70% of the new affordable housing units as Social or Affordable Rented properties with the balance made up of other affordable tenures (most of the other affordable tenures will be low cost home ownership in the form of Shared Ownership);
- c. affordable housing is dispersed across the development in small clusters of dwellings; and
- d. it ensures that the appearance of affordable housing units is externally indistinguishable from that of open market housing.

### **Design**

As stated above (d) of LP24 states, the Council aspires to consistency of design and quality of housing across affordable and market housing. It does not follow that distinctly differing approaches in design of affordable housing compared to market homes is acceptable.

The design of affordable housing will as far as possible be consistent in approach to market housing and enable affordable housing occupants to enjoy the same quality of environment as market housing occupants.

In order to achieve tenure blind layout, the development will avoid unnecessary parking courts, poor relationship of parking to home, lack of on plot parking and significantly higher density than market housing.

As per the Council's Developers Contribution SPD, affordable housing will be distributed throughout a site in clusters. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Council, not more than fifteen (15) Affordable Housing Units shall be located in any one cluster and no cluster of Affordable Housing Units shall be immediately adjacent to or in close proximity to any other cluster

Additionally, party walls of differing tenures should be avoided as occupants of differing tenures may receive different management arrangements.

For flats/apartments/maisonettes it is desirable to avoid communal areas which will result in service charges. Two storey blocks should ideally have an external door. In any event no more than three storeys blocks are acceptable as this would prevent the need for lifts.

All new homes are to meet Building Regulation M4(2). In addition, as per LP25, for a large scale development (50 or more units, or 2 hectares, or 2,500m<sup>2</sup> as per Local Plan) a proportion of market homes should be to m4(3) and regardless of development size a proportion of m4(3) affordable housing should be provided.

Precise levels of need will vary in response to circumstances, where proposals state that meeting such requirements would be impractical or unviable, (such as may be the case where floor levels need to be raised due to flood risk and this would necessitate significant ramping to comply with the standards), developers of affordable housing should provide evidence supporting this conclusion.

Further detail on need is expanded further at para 7.22 of LP25, which suggests that to meet need, 9% of market homes and 30% of affordable housing should be m4(3) and in the Huntingdonshire Accessible and Specialist Housing Evidence Paper.

### **Type of property**

The Council will at the appropriate time (site by site), specify the type, number and tenure required. In preparing this the Council is mindful of need and takes into account (if necessary) specific site issues. LP24 is once again relevant, it states (in addition to the matters already mentioned):

“In order to assist in meeting the identified local need for additional affordable homes, a proposal which includes housing development will be required to provide a range of affordable housing types, sizes and tenures. These should be appropriate to meet the requirements of the local community taking into account the latest evidence from the Housing Register, the Cambridgeshire sub-region Strategic Housing Market Assessment and other local sources. The affordable housing may include specialist or supported housing where an identified need exists”



The following mix of homes size by tenure is suggested as a strategic mix for Huntingdonshire for the 2020-2040 period in the Housing Needs of Specific Groups in October 2021.

Size	Market	Affordable Homes to Buy	Affordable Homes to Rent
1 bedroom	0-10%	15-25%	30-40%
2 bedroom	20-30%	35-45%	35-45%
3 bedroom	40-50%	25-35%	15-25%
4 bedroom	20-30%	5-15%	0-1

In accordance with LP24 the Council refers to other evidence, which is equally important, most notably the more up to date Housing Register data. As an overview:

- Accommodation for families should be properties with two or more bedrooms.
- The mix of types of property (house, flat, bungalow)
- The number of homes which should be m4(3).
- For flats regardless of whether they are m4(3), if they are on the ground floor bathrooms should be provided with level access shower or wet room, this also applies to any bungalows.

### Size of units Property size

The Council's Local Plan is currently under review, the current plan does not require homes to meet the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS) although the emerging plan is intended to require all affordable housing to be to Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS). Nonetheless our Local Plan does make reference to NDSS, it states:

**(LP25 para 7.18)** The current Local Plan does not include a policy requirement for new housing to meet the Nationally Described Space Standard. However, developers may wish to refer to the Technical housing standards – nationally described space standards to evidence how their proposals meet the broader policy requirement of providing housing of sizes which help achieve sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities. In relation to this particularly for affordable housing for rent and in contrast to much market housing, it should be recognised that such homes are likely to be fully occupied

NDSS is therefore encouraged and in considering housebuilder/developer proposals a 'fit for purpose' approach will be taken. As confirmed affordable housing will be fully occupied so standards should be such that this is indeed recognised.

Occupation levels will also be considered, for example, 2 bedroom houses should be 4 person and not 3 person as is sometimes proposed.

For shared ownership the need is mostly for 2 and 3 bedroom houses. As the housing is for sale, a 'spare' room can be considered hence for example a household with a minimum requirement of one bedroom can be considered for a 2 bedroom home.

**NOTE** As per policy, all homes are to be m4(2). All the bungalows including m4(2) to be wheelchair accessible with level access shower/wet room or to full wheelchair standard m4(3) where indicated; full wheelchair m4(3) to have hoist capacity (to be fitted for first or subsequent tenant) allowing easy transfer from main bedroom to bathroom. Convenient level access route from car to home in a wheelchair to be confirmed on plans provided within the planning application Our Special Housing Needs Officer may from time to time ask for some of the rented homes to be adapted to meet the needs of applicant families. She will liaise with the RP and yourselves to confirm necessary details. Please note also number of persons to be housed by property type and tenure.

Number of bedrooms	Gross Internal Floorspace
1 bedroom flat	50 sq. m
2 bedroom 4 person 2 storey house	79 sq. m
3 bedroom 5 person 2 storey house	93 sq. m
4 bedroom 6 person 3 storey house	112 sq. m

**Unit size** Accommodation should meet the following

Number of bedrooms	Minimum number of people
1 bedroom flat	2 person
1 bedroom bungalow	2 person
2 bedroom flat	4 person
2 bedroom bungalow	At least 50% 4 person
2 bedroom house	4 person
3 bedroom	5 person
4 bedroom	6 person

Nb – 2 bedroom bungalow 50% to be 3 person 50% to be 4 person

### **Adaptable and Accessible**

In reflection of the ageing population within the District 20% of one bed units to be built to HAPPI design principles – with particular attention given to:

- layouts maximise natural light and ventilation by avoiding internal corridors and single-aspect flats,
- all apartments have balconies, patios, or terraces with enough space for table and chairs as well as plants;

- Adequate storage is available inside & outside the home together with provision for cycles and mobility aids, storage inside the home meets the needs of the occupier;
- In the implementation of measures to ensure adaptability, homes are designed to be 'care ready' so that new and emerging technologies, such as telecare and community equipment, can be readily instal

All new homes are to meet Building Regulation M4(2) in addition around 30% of homes are to meet Building Regulation M4(3) overall, but precise levels of need will vary in response to circumstances:

30% of homes are to meet Building Regulation M4(3). **LP25 M4(3) Category 3** – 'Wheelchair User Dwellings', split into two sub-types:

- Category 3 (a) – 'Wheelchair adaptable' (providing space and layout features, but not fully fitted out), and
- Category 3 (b) – 'Wheelchair accessible' (ready and fitted to accommodate wheelchair user household)

The majority of M4(3) will be M4(3a) unless specified.

### **New build warranty and adaptations to M4(2) properties**

In order to meet the needs of a specific household, adaptations may be required to an affordable home.

The housebuilder/developer and Registered Provider should enable the provision of such adaptations at any time, either at first or subsequent let unless the works significantly impacts on the structure of the property. Any building work would be carried out carefully by competent contractors who are fully insured.

It should be possible for Building Defects warranties not to be adversely affected and as a result identified adaptations required to make property accessible to M4(3a) to M4(3b), will be incorporated.

### **Alternative Tenures**

As the evidence base (Housing Needs of Specific Groups) shows by some margin, the most pressing need is for Affordable Rented and Social Rented housing. For this reason, policy specifies that 70% of new affordable housing should be to these tenures.

In terms of low cost home ownership (addressing the needs of those aspiring to own their own home but unable to afford housing at market levels) the Council considers the best option is Shared Ownership. This addresses the needs of a variety of

income groups; differing proportions of initial ownership can be acquired dependant on an applicant's circumstances. As those circumstances improve additional tranches can be acquired and ultimately staircasing to full ownership can be achieved. It follows that the remaining 30% is mostly expected to be Shared Ownership.

Whilst Shared Ownership is the Council's preferred route to Affordable Home Ownership. The Council may also accept other affordable housing tenures where these are justified by particular local needs or circumstances and consistent with national policy.

The needs of specific groups such as Key Workers may also from time to time be considered, and this may include considering which tenures best suit the groups under consideration.

### Services charges

Service charges should be kept reasonable and within Local Housing Allowance (LHA). The total costs of rent and service charges for all affordable units should not exceed LHA levels at each letting. Early consultation is recommended with the Strategy and Enabling team to minimise high service charge costs

#### HDC Local Housing Allowance rate April 24 – 31 March 25

	Huntingdon Area	Cambridge Area	Peterborough Area	Northampton Central Area
Shared Accommodation Weekly Rate	£105.86 (£458.72)	£121.13 (£524.90)	£79.36 (£343.89)	£86.50 (£374.83)
1 Bedroom Weekly Rate	£149.59 (£648.22)	£207.12 (£897.52)	£132.33 (£573.43)	£126.58 (£548.51)
2 Bedroom Weekly Rate	£182.96 (£792.83)	£218.63 (£947.40)	£161.10 (£698.10)	£159.95 (£693.12)
3 Bedroom Weekly Rate	£218.63 (£947.40)	£258.90 (£1121.90)	£186.41 (£807.78)	£182.96 (£792.83)
4 Bedroom Weekly Rate	£287.67 (£1246.57)	£333.70 (£1446.03)	£241.64 (£1047.11)	£228.99 (£992.29)

### Developer/housebuilder/landowner form of Affordable Housing provision

Affordable Housing is expected to be provided on site without any public subsidy, this would be in line with Homes England policy and the same would apply to any commuted sums the Council holds. The Council secures this through a Section 106 Planning Obligation usually in the standard form.

Registered Providers will submit offers based on the tenure and types of Affordable Housing specified in the planning application (without public subsidy). The S106 will specify:

- Relevant definitions for Affordable Housing.
- Details of an Affordable Housing Scheme requiring formal submission and approval by the Council before commencement of development. The Scheme confirms the details of the Affordable Housing to be provided (mix, types, tenure etc.), the identity of the Registered Provider and that terms are agreed to deliver the Scheme, the nomination levels to accrue to the Council and the manner in which Shared Ownership is to be addressed.
- Timescales in which the Affordable Housing must be delivered relative to market homes (for example not to occupy more than 'x' % of the market homes until 'y'% of the affordable homes have been transferred to the Registered Provider and are ready for occupation).
- Mortgagee in Possessions clauses which are essential to all the Registered Providers to enable them to secure the necessary finance.

### **Approach to Public Subsidy**

Public Subsidy in the form of grant from Homes England or Commuted Sums secured by the Council in lieu of onsite affordable housing provision is not eligible for delivering policy level affordable housing (the usual 40%).

If Public Subsidy is available the Council will work with Registered Providers, Homes England and other interested parties to secure 'additionality' to deliver affordable housing in excess of policy level. The Council has in partnership with Registered Providers, delivered a number of developments in this way including developments delivering 100% affordable housing.

The Council will in appropriate circumstances, continue in principle to support such initiatives which secure additional affordable housing.

In those discussions the Council is mindful to still address identified need but also to ensure sustainable development is delivered. The Council will use Local Lettings Plans for the rented homes which allow the Council and Registered Providers to allocate accommodation such that they deliver a balanced community, these developments will often involve a significant proportion of Shared Ownership.

### **Viability**

The council generally delivers policy level affordable housing on site, on rare occasions there may be reasons why this is not viable. In these circumstances the Council requires formal submission of a Viability Assessment. This needs to be such that it provides a detailed financial assessment of the development costs. The Council will appoint consultants to scrutinise the assessment and form a view as to whether there is a Viability barrier.

The Council will ask its consultants to consider a number of options to consider whether different forms of affordable housing is viable. This may involve considering a lower level of affordable housing or different proportions of tenures (if a quantum of 40% with 70% rented housing and 30% shared ownership is considered unviable). It will also consider if there is scope to secure a financial contribution in lieu of onsite provision (see below Commuted Sums).

The cost of employing a consultant must be borne by the applicant and payable in advance in order for the Council to instruct the consultants.

### **Commuted Sums**

Commuted Sums, payments to the Council in lieu of on-site affordable housing provision, are secured via S106 Planning Obligations. This will confirm that the Council will use these funds to assist delivery of affordable housing at another location in the District. This is generally calculated based on residual land value.

### **Rural Exceptions Housing.**

Local Plan Policy LP28 confirms that:

*“A proposal for housing will be supported on a site well-related to a built-up area, as an exception to the requirements of relevant policies, where it can be demonstrated that:*

*a. at least 60% (net) of the site area is for affordable housing for people with a local connection;*

*b. the number, size, type and tenure of the affordable homes is justified by evidence that they would meet an identified need arising within the settlement or nearby small settlements (as defined in 'Small Settlements') through a local needs survey or other local needs evidence;*

*c. the remainder of the site area is available as open market housing or plots suitable for custom or self-build homes tailored to meet locally generated need; and*  
*d. the amount of development and location of the proposal is sustainable in terms of:*

*i. availability of services and existing infrastructure; ii. opportunities for users of the proposed development to travel by sustainable modes;*

*and*

*ii. effect on the character of the immediate locality and the settlement as a whole.*

*Mechanisms, including planning conditions/ obligations, will be put in place to ensure that the affordable housing is delivered and remains affordable in perpetuity or for the appropriate period as applicable to the form of housing. To ensure that market housing and affordable housing elements are delivered concurrently a planning condition will be applied.”*

The policy is intended to primarily provide rural housing for people with a connection to the village under consideration. The connection can be:

- by living in the village,
- having previously lived in the village,
- having close relatives in the village, or,
- having an employment connection.

It is essential that formal evidence of need is provided, and this should be by way of a local Housing Needs Survey. To ensure independence, the Survey is carried out by Cambridgeshire ACRE, this survey is usually funded by the Registered Provider or Landowner. The Council works with CACRE, Parish Councils, Registered Providers and other interested parties.

More detailed criteria is set out in LP28 but if they are met and need is established, the affordable housing should occupy not less than 60% of the proposed net site area and the remainder can comprise of market housing.

Links to documents referred to in this paper:

[Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#)

[Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document](#)

[Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK](#)

[CWS Table](#)

[Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard - GOV.UK](#)

[Housing our Ageing Population Plan for Implementation.pdf](#)

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/2687/huntingdonshire-accessible-and-specialist-housing-evidence-paper.pdf>

This page is intentionally left blank



**Public**  
**Key Decision – No**

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Market Towns Programme - Winter Update

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) – 4th December 2024  
Cabinet – 10th December 2024

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

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

**Ward(s) affected:** All

---

### **Executive Summary:**

This report provides the Winter 2024 update on the Market Towns Programme (MTP).

The MTP is an ambitious programme of economic-led interventions to renew and reshape our town centres and high streets in a way that promotes growth, improves experiences, and ensures sustainability in the future, it therefore supports the Huntingdonshire Futures Journey of Pride in Place and the Corporate Plan by creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations.

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(s):**

The Cabinet is asked to:

- Note contents of report and delivery progress concerning the Market Town's Programme and related activities.

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

- 1.1 To provide an update on activity across all strands of the Market Town Programme.

## **2. RAMSEY TOWN CENTRE ENHANCEMENT**

- 2.1. The Ramsey sub programme comprises of three linked activities, which include:

- The pedestrianisation of a focused area within the Great Whyte area of Ramsey town centre.
- The development of up to six 'shop in a box' small retail units in this pedestrianised location.
- Improvements to the Mews Close car park to mitigate street parking loss and improve the visitor experience.

- 2.2. The Council has undertaken an in-depth engagement exercise with businesses and residents of Ramsey to gain their views on potential improvements as part of the three project areas listed. A number of different project ideas were presented at in-person events on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> September, which were attended by over 200 people. An online consultation based on a set of survey questions was also operated between the 26<sup>th</sup> September and 17<sup>th</sup> October. 300 online survey responses were completed during this time.

- 2.3. We are currently reviewing the responses provided, with the intent to adjust and improve project proposals. Most of the responses provided were positive and in support of the improvements suggested. Where residents/businesses objected to specific project ideas, this was mostly focused on parking issues and ensuring parking is close to the core of the town centre, including disabled parking spaces. Several comments highlighted the need for quick turnaround spaces for those using local takeaways, for example.

- 2.4. Following completion of this process, HDC will develop a preferred scheme. This scheme, comprised of the three projects detailed, will be subject to a further consultation process, as part of a formal planning application for specific elements of the scheme in early 2025.

- 2.5. As previously reported, we intend to improve Mews Close Car Park as an enabling project to offset the loss of spaces within the Great Whyte and before any other works proceed. This may include resurfacing, improvements to the car park access and remarking of bays. The current parking layout is inefficient and with improvements we will potentially be able to increase the car parking capacity. The initial target for works commencing was January, however, this will be subject to access arrangements and whether this will require some form of development management consent.

- 2.6. In parallel to the physical improvement projects, HDC is also working to provide business support to Ramsey traders as part of the UK Shared

Prosperity Fund programme (reported upon separately). To date, seven businesses have received additional training and support towards improving business performance.

### **3. HUNTINGDON AND ST IVES PROGRAMME**

#### **Cattle Market Living Wall, St Ives**

- 3.1. HDC has developed a new 'Living Wall' project in St Ives. The purpose of the project was to improve the setting of the bus station and the adjacent Cattle Market area, using planting as part of a wall structure. The existing fencing was in a dilapidated state of repair and was primarily made up of corrugated metal, and timber fencing.
- 3.2. Work on the Living Wall was started in November and took two weeks to complete. The improvements have been received very positively by residents and local businesses in the area. Whilst the Living Wall was designed to require minimal maintenance, any maintenance will be overseen by HDC at minimal cost by the Operations team, when they are already in the area .
- 3.3. Before and after images of the Living Wall are included in appendix A.

#### **Cromwell Museum expansion, Huntingdon**

- 3.4. HDC is working closely with Huntingdon Town Council and Cromwell Museum to support the acquisition of new premises, in which the Museum can expand its significant and internationally recognised collection into.
- 3.5. The Cromwell Museum occupies the historic former school building attended by Oliver Cromwell, in Huntingdon Market Square. HDC is providing funding via the Market Town Programme to purchase 7 to 8 Market Square, located opposite the existing Museum building.
- 3.6. Following a detailed due diligence process, which identified remedial works that would be required, in addition to the suitability of the building for a new expanded Museum facility, Huntingdon Town Council voted at an extraordinary meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024 to proceed with the acquisition.
- 3.7. The due diligence work played a key role in identifying risks associated with the property and the remedial works required, so that the Town Council could make a fully informed decision. Additional surveys were also utilised to secure a significantly reduced purchase price, balancing against the cost of the remedial works required.
- 3.8. Huntingdon Town Council is proceeding with the acquisition, after which a 99-year lease at a peppercorn rate will be put in place with Cromwell Museum. The Museum will be responsible for developing proposals for the new expanded Museum and securing the necessary funding. This project is expected to be of a significant scale requiring up to £3 million in funding. Positive discussions have already been held with the Heritage Lottery Fund in anticipation of a funding application being submitted for the project to secure the majority of funds required.

3.9. The existing Museum building will be retained as part of a linked Cromwell Museum, utilising both properties. As part of the funding agreement with the Town Council there is a provision preventing the resale of this property without consent by Huntingdonshire District Council.

#### 4. SHOP FRONT GRANT SCHEME – ALL MARKET TOWNS

4.1. The Shop Front Grant scheme is now closed to all new applications. The scheme has been successful, allocating over £250,000 of funds to businesses within the four main market towns and across the district, as part of an expansion of the programme.

4.2. All funds have either been fully spent or allocated to grant applicants. Work is now focusing, before the project fully closes in March 2025, on supporting the remaining schemes through the planning process (where applicable) and onto final works being completed. A summary of grants allocated, and locations is included before for reference:

#### Grants allocated (as of 8<sup>th</sup> October):

	Huntingdon	St Ives	St Neots	Ramsey	District	Total
Applications	18	21	22	10	9	80
Award numbers	15	15	9	6	7	52
Reject numbers	2	6	13	4	2	27
To be reviewed	1	0	0	0	0	1
Grant award	£68,341	£39,711	£50,936	£14,850	£20,985	£194,823
Total cost of works	£82,183	£55,846	£108,165	£23,800	£25,596	£295,589
Completions	8	7	3	2	0	20
Paid Grants	£31,185	£19,041	£13,799	£4,650	0	£68,675

#### 5. DIGITAL INFORMATION SCREENS – ALL MARKET TOWNS

5.1. HDC continues to work towards delivery of the Digital Information Screens with our delivery partner Trueform.

5.2. HDC Officers have visited the manufacturing plant where the screens are being built and have assessed the first screen to be manufactured. Following initial feedback to Trueform, work is proceeding on improving how the screens function, including software and general trouble shooting.

5.3. Once HDC Officers are satisfied with the screen functionality, the full set of Digital Screens will be completed by Trueform, ahead of installation in the agreed locations.

5.4. HDC is also continuing to work with St Ives, Ramsey, St Neots and Huntingdon Town Councils and Huntingdon BID on finalising screen content. Business databases for all four locations have been developed

alongside information on events and local areas which will form the information content.

- 5.5. We have encountered some delays due to utility issues in relation to the power supply to the screens, but, we are working through these and whilst this may extend installation into early 2025, we expect to complete the project satisfactorily and within funding timescales.

## **6. ST NEOTS**

### **Priory Centre**

- 6.1. Refurbishment and expansion of the Priory Centre is one of the most significant projects within the Market Town programme. It will deliver major improvements to the Priory Centre, which will enable it to offer a much broader range of services and facilities in a vastly improved setting.
- 6.2. In September, HDC secured planning consent for an extension of the building, which, along with other major internal refurbishment work, will expand the Centre's capacity and financial sustainability. We have also identified a preferred contractor, following the completion of a thorough contractor procurement process.
- 6.3. Following the achievement of planning consent HDC has been working with our architects to complete the necessary work to discharge the pre-commencement planning conditions, which are required before work can commence on the building. We have also been reviewing all works required to mitigate risk and delays for the project, this is the same approach that was taken for the Town Centre Improvement Project. More recently officers have been working with the contractor to finalise all scheme elements and costs, in advance of the main works beginning on site in January 2025. It should also be noted that there will be enabling works ahead of this, during December, to prepare the Centre. This will include removal of internal fixtures and fittings.
- 6.4. We are currently working with the Town Council as part of the final budget setting process and once costs are confirmed, we will present these and also updated leasehold arrangements to the Town Council. It is expected that final decisions on these matters will be taken by the Town Council during December 2024.

### **Energy Feasibility Study**

- 6.5. HDC has been ambitious with the Priory Centre project, and this has also extended to improving energy sustainability for the building. We have developed a scheme which significantly improves energy efficiency through new windows, insulation and building systems.
- 6.6. We have also commissioned, in parallel to the main design work, an energy feasibility study to consider options for more sustainable energy provision. Whilst we are already aware from earlier research that the electrical capacity of this location is limited, the energy study has a wider

remit to not only consider electrical supply but also to inform and enable a move to more sustainable energy sources more broadly at the site. The study also integrates the neighbouring Oast House and Library, in addition to the Priory Centre.

- 6.7. As the Priory Centre is at a riverside location, we wish to fully explore harnessing this asset through a water sourced heating pump (WSHP). A WSHP system has major potential advantages over an air sourced heating pump (ASHP). Most notably, river water temperatures are more stable than air temperatures, so the WSHP can operate more efficiently than air-source systems, as it has a reliable heat source in winter and a heat sink in summer.
- 6.8. Whilst we had hoped to complete the energy feasibility study during 2024, our initial work has confirmed a requirement for up to 12 months of consultation and engagement with the Environmental Agency.
- 6.9. Notwithstanding the issues concerning wider electrical capacity and budgetary constraints, this extended engagement schedule means it is not possible to deliver a heat pump of whichever type identified as optimal by the study during the main construction phase of the Priory Centre project.
- 6.10. Consequently, and subject to the outcomes of the Energy Feasibility Study, if an ASHP/WSHP is recommended for the Priory Centre (and potentially supporting the Oast House as well if WSHP), this will necessarily form a separate project. It would follow on from completion of the Priory Centre, subject to funds being secured for delivery.
- 6.11. To ensure that the Priory Centre can transition to an ASHP system in the future, we have ensured that the design for mechanical and electrical plant infrastructure, as part of the current improvement scheme, can accommodate both the existing gas-based supply and also an ASHP system, once this has been confirmed as feasible.
- 6.12. The future proofing of the scheme plant design will ensure that any subsequent conversion to ASHP can be accommodated quickly and efficiently, with minimal adjustments to the Priory Centre's systems and infrastructure.
- 6.13. Whilst 6.11 and 6.12 relate purely to ASHP, insulation and heating systems would also be compatible with a WSHP, although they would require further design work to connect to the building as we cannot anticipate in advance what the required specification would be.

## **Old Falcon**

- 6.14. Work towards securing a policy compliant planning consent is proceeding satisfactorily on the Old Falcon. Once in place, planning consent will enable the current owner to bring the building back into productive use for the benefit of St Neots town centre.

- 6.15. The planning application was submitted at the end of September 2024 and has now been validated. The project team, which includes Officers from across the Council and external advisers, has worked very closely with the Planning Authority and key consultees including Historic England and HDC Conservation and Urban Design Officers.
- 6.16. The scheme designs have been well received by these parties, in addition to enjoying broader support from the public. During this Summer, the project team shared information concerning the planning application designs with members of the public as part of an engagement event in the Market Square. Local members and the Town Council have also been consulted as part of this process. The proposals have received widespread support in these engagements.
- 6.17. Subject to planning consent being secured, HDC will continue to work with the owner towards bringing forward the regeneration of this important building.
- 6.18. As an interim measure, works to the building façade are being programmed by HDC in partnership with the building owner. A contractor has been selected to undertake improvements including repainting, removing vegetation from guttering and providing new covers to windows and doors, to provide the Old Falcon with a fresh look that gives the appearance of the building being in active use. The completion of these works is being coordinated with the wider Market Square works.
- 6.19. In terms of biodiversity, an emergency Bat license has been submitted to Natural England, this is to remove the bats from the building and enable the closure of any holes, as well as enabling the owner to repair the gable end. The project team are working with HDC Biodiversity to relocate the bats to bat boxes across the other side of the river.

### **Town Centre Improvements**

- 6.20. The project is being delivered by Taylor Woodrow and HDC Officers are being supported by Cambridgeshire County Council in a project management capacity as the Highways Authority.
- 6.21. The contract with Taylor Woodrow was for a 60 week build period, completing at the end of March 2025. At an early stage in the scheme, we aimed to be able to have completed works in the Market Square prior to Christmas 2024, though made clear this was highly ambitious and far from clear it would be possible. Unfortunately, as was advised in our last update, the identification of an unknown and unidentified cast iron service main in the ground underneath the square prevented us from achieving this ambition.
- 6.22. The identification of the cast iron main required manual rather than mechanical excavation which increased time on this activity and was more impactful than initially hoped, requiring a significant redesign of the underground drainage system. This could have culminated in a delay to

the original programme of up to 16 weeks. Officers worked with Taylor Woodrow to replan the programme of works and bring forward activity on the High Street and Bridge, to limit the impact on the wider programme, including introducing working on Saturdays; although we are now aware that this has not prevented implications on timing for the wider project. The team's main concern at all times has been public and contractor safety.

- 6.23. Over the last several weeks HDC Officers have requested further reprogramming of the project to fully understand the implications of this work around. Whilst we were hoping that the works on the Market Square could complete earlier (January 2025) than the contracted project completion of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, this has not been possible. The project team have successfully mitigated the potential 16 week delay caused by the issues earlier in the year by bringing forward other elements of the project instead (such as the works on the High Street). This ensured the overall project completion date has slipped as little as possible, and has minimised any extension to the works and disruption this could cause. However, this has come at the cost of not being able to complete the Market Square element of the works by January 2025 as initially hoped.
- 6.24. The current predicted date for completion by the Contractor is now April 2025, rather than the contracted date of March 2025. This takes into account the issues that have been found, on top of the complexity and scale of the project, and recent supplier delays on materials (rain garden blocks). Whilst the project has up to now been able to manage changes brought about by weather events (including periods of very heavy rain), it is important to note that the current date does not take into account a potential severe weather event taking place over the winter. Given that the project is fully outside, an event of this nature could impact this date further. This is an inevitable uncertainty with a project of this nature.
- 6.25. In terms of specific work completions, and upcoming works in the next period:
- The north side rain garden construction is in progress (two complete, one left to build) and paving works progressing at pace.
  - On schedule to open north side by the end of November and begin construction on south side.
  - Enabling works to have been completed on south side between market days, which we expect will speed up works on south side versus north.
  - South side footways, footway/loading bay outside Old Falcon and most vehicle accesses repaved.
  - High Street/New Street resurfacing is complete.
  - Huntingdon St crossroads new crossing and footway improvements complete except new guard rail on SW corner have been completed.
  - Bridge footways and New St crossroads footways works to take place after Christmas.



## Performance Stage

- 6.25. HDC continues to work with stakeholders on developing design options for a new Performance Stage that could be located in the Market Square. As noted in previous reports, the initial feasibility stage is being managed by HDC; however, should a decision be made for the project to proceed to detailed design and delivery, it is anticipated that St Neots Town Council would take over its management. HDC Officers would continue to support the Town Council in this regard.
- 6.26. The project was originally endorsed for initial development in 2023 by the St Neots Masterplan phase 1 steering group. This steering group comprised of representatives from the Town Council, community and business groups, and was the consultative forum used previously for developing regeneration proposals for St Neots town centre.
- 6.27. A stage 1 engagement and design draft report was previously completed for the project. Within this report, three design concepts were developed based on varying principles and design approaches. A stage 2 user focused workshop was held on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024, and a public engagement event was held at St Neots Market on the 7<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The online consultation remained open until the 5<sup>th</sup> December.
- 6.28. The purpose of the workshop and public engagement event was to receive feedback on the further design options developed. This information, alongside input from partners and design specialists, will be used to produce a final report. This report will also include costings for each of the design options.
- 6.29. Upon completion of the report, we will reach and enabled a decision point on whether to proceed, and if so, with which design option. The decision on whether or not to proceed with the project, and any engagement required to inform this decision, will rest with St Neots Town Council, as the Town Council would necessarily be responsible for managing and maintaining any stage structure developed. Should the project not be taken forward for detailed design and delivery, both HDC and St Neots Town Council would consult with CPCA on potential options regarding the remaining funding earmarked to support it, which was previously unspent and due to be returned to CPCA at the point we secured agreement to repurpose towards this project.
- 6.30. On this point, it should be highlighted that there are significant questions remaining around cost, practicality, and conservation/heritage/planning impact on the Market Square. A measure of caution should therefore be exercised when anticipating whether the project will proceed to delivery, or alternative options will need to be considered to help the Market Square to be a focus as a cultural and civic hub. The views of Town Council members, given their greater role in the next stages of the project, will naturally be critical to this.

## **Public Art**

- 6.31. This project is funded from the Market Towns Programme budget and is being delivered directly by St Neots Town Council. The role of the District Council in the project is to monitor project delivery by the Town Council and to report progress to the CPCA as the funding body.
- 6.32. The project has moved through its initial stage with the appointed contractors undertaking consultation and engagement work as part of developing specific themes and options for the basis of the artwork. The appointed contractors are in the process of working with a Working Group of the Town Council to agree the chosen theme and medium on which designs/options will be progressed for consideration by the Council.
- 6.33. 25% of the funds available have been paid to the contractor to deliver this first stage. A further 25% of the funds are due to be paid to the contractor to start delivery of specific artwork and designs based on the agreed themes and mediums. The remaining funds would be paid on completion of the artwork.

## 7. FINANCE UPDATE

Funding source	Grant secured	Spend to date	Balance
<b>1. St Neots Regeneration</b>			
Future High Street Fund	£3,748,815	£2,395,862	£1,352,953
Community Infrastructure Levy	£4,830,000	£0	£4,830,000
CPCA	£3,100,000	£491,526	£2,608,474
National Highways	£3,493,218	£3,493,218	£0
CPCA Masterplan phase 1 (legacy)	£260,000	£100,000	£160,000
<b>Funding totals</b>	<b>£15,432,033</b>	<b>£6,480,606</b>	<b>£8,951,427</b>

Funding source	Grant secured	Spend to dare	Balance
<b>2. Huntingdon &amp; St Ives</b>			
CPCA Masterplans & Accelerated Funding (*post change control March 2023)	£802,150	£414,041	£388,109
<b>Funding totals</b>	<b>£802,150</b>	<b>£414,041</b>	<b>£388,109</b>

Funding source	Grant secured	Spend to dare	Balance
<b>3. Ramsey</b>			
Local Growth Fund	£1,153,525	£0	£1,153,525
UKSP (revenue)	£221,000	£45,548	£175,452
CPCA Accelerated Funding (legacy)	£295,000	£41,274	£253,726
<b>Funding totals</b>	<b>£1,669,525</b>	<b>£86,822</b>	<b>£1,582,703</b>

Funding source	Grant secured	Spend to date	Balance
<b>4. Programme total</b>			

All funding sources	£17,903,708	£6,981,469 £1,878,635 expenditure (or 10.5% of total budget) since previous report in July 2024.	£10,922,239
---------------------	-------------	--	-------------

## 8. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 8.1. The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be circulated in advance of the Cabinet meeting.

## 9. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

### BUDGET MANAGEMENT RISK

- 9.1. 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.
- 9.2. One of the most significant elements of the MTP was the St Neots Town Centre Improvements. The tender process for this resulted in costs being confirmed at a significant cost saving compared to previous estimates. This lowered the risk for this project and the programme overall significantly.
- 9.3. The Priory Centre project currently presents an elevated risk level in cost terms. As another construction-based scheme it is likely to be affected by the significant inflation this sector has experienced in the two years. HDC has recently confirmed a preferred contractor for the works. We will work with the contractor to finalise scheme costings, and if necessary, will seek to value engineer the scheme components to ensure the scheme is deliverable within current budget.

### PROGRAMME RESOURCE RISKS

- 9.4. 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.
- 9.5. 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. 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 RISKS**

- 9.6. 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. A further key element is having in place a well-planned Communications Plan. This is monitored weekly and designed to be proactive, looking ahead several months for potential issues for which communications and publicity are important tools for resolving.
- 9.7. Further to this, 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.

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

- 10.1. The delivery of the MTP is aligned with the principles and key objectives of the HDC Corporate Plan, specifically it links to:
- Priority 2: Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations, through Forward Thinking Economic Growth

## **11. CONSULTATION**

- 11.1. Within the reporting period, it should be noted that a non-statutory engagement or consultation event has been undertaken concerning the Ramsey Great Whyte project (see paragraph 2.2). 300 online surveys were submitted, whilst approximately 200 people visited an in-person exhibition. The responses are currently being reviewed and will be used to inform the preparation of a preferred scheme design and deliverables.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.2. This programme contains multiple projects where legal advice and guidance is required as part of project delivery. Project Staff will liaise with the Legal Services Manager as required to ensure appropriate legal oversight and advice if provided when relevant.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.3. The MTP Project team is currently fully resourced in staffing and budget terms to deliver the MTP programme as set out.

## **EQUALITIES**

- 11.4. 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.

- 11.5. 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.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL**

- 11.6. 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.

- 11.8. 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.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

**Appendix A:** Before and after images – St Ives Living Wall

## 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](#)
- Market Towns Programme Autumn 2023 Update to Cabinet October 2023 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Winter 2023 Update to Cabinet December 2023 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Spring 2024 Update to Cabinet April 2024 can be found [here](#)
- Market Towns Programme Summer 2024 Update to Cabinet April 2024 can be found [here](#)

## CONTACT OFFICER

Name/Job Title: Pamela Scott, Regeneration & Housing Delivery Manager  
Tel No: 01480 388486  
Email: [pamela.scott@huntingdonshre.gov.uk](mailto:pamela.scott@huntingdonshre.gov.uk)

This page is intentionally left blank



**St Ives Living Wall**  
**Before and After images**

**Before:**



**AFTER:**



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

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

**Title/Subject Matter:** Business Rates – Rural Settlement List

**Meeting/Date:** Overview and Scrutiny (Environment, Communities and Partnerships) – 5th December 2024  
Cabinet – 10th December 2024

**Executive Portfolio:** Cllr S Ferguson – Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance

**Report by:** Revenues and Benefits Manager

**Ward(s) affected:** All

---

### **Executive Summary:**

The Local Government and Rating Act 1997 requires that each rating authority must compile and maintain a Rural Settlement List comprising of settlements with a population of less than 3,000.

The intention of the Rural Settlement List is to allow Huntingdonshire District Council to grant business rates relief to qualifying post offices, village shops, public houses and petrol stations to support rural businesses and communities.

Following a review of the latest population data estimates available from Cambridgeshire County Council, three changes are proposed to the List where settlements no longer meet the conditions to be classed as Rural. This will result in one business being impacted, with whom the Business Rates team will make contact to offer support and advice, if needed.

### **Recommendation:**

The Cabinet is

### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1) to approve Huntingdonshire District Council's Rural Settlement List for publication by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, to facilitate the award of Rural Business Rates Relief for the financial year commencing 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.
- 2) to delegate authority for approval of future Rural Settlement Lists to the Section 151 officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance.

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

- 1.1 The Council is required to review and determine boundaries of Rural settlements, that is, those with a population of less than 3,000, to facilitate the award of Rural Rate Relief in accordance with s42(b) of The Local Government Finance Act 1988, as amended by The Local Government and Rating Act 1997.
- 1.2 It is a requirement of the above regulations that boundaries are set and published by 31<sup>st</sup> December each year.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Rural rate relief is applied to certain types of business within a rural settlement. It can be awarded where the only village shop or post office in the settlement has a rateable value of up to £8,500 or the only public house or petrol station has a rateable value of up to £12,500.
- 2.2 The Local Government Finance Act 1988 sets out that it is the responsibility of the local authority to determine any settlements which:
- a) Are wholly or partly within the authorities' area
  - b) Appear to have a population of not more than 3,000
  - c) and are wholly or partly within a rural area designated by the Secretary of State for the purposes of rate relief scheme.
- 2.3 A rural settlement does not necessarily have to follow ward or parish boundaries. A defined settlement can be applied by splitting an area based on other characteristics, such as geographical or demographic features.

## **3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS**

- 3.1 Towns and parishes within Huntingdonshire are all designated as one of three types of settlement:

Urban settlements – population above 3,000

Rural settlements – population below 3,000

Defined settlements – Where the total parish population exceeds 3,000, but a specific area within that parish has been “defined” as a separate rural settlement.

- 3.2 The current rural settlements list has been reviewed to take account of the latest statistical population data available from Cambridgeshire County Council.
- 3.3 As a result of the review, two settlements that were previously considered to be Rural settlements have been reclassified as Urban settlements, for their population now exceeds 3,000. The affected settlements are Buckden & Diddington, and The Stukeleys. There are no businesses that currently qualify for rural rate relief within these settlements.

3.4 The Parish of Fenstanton was previously designated as a Defined settlement due to the split geographical location of settlements within the parish, with the village area being classified as a Rural settlement.

3.5 Following a review of population data, the village area population now exceeds 3,000, and so the parish has been reclassified as an Urban settlement. There is one business that will be affected by the change, with whom the Business Rates team will make contact to explore if any other support and advice is available or needed.

3.6 The following parishes are classified as defined settlements in order to maximise the number of businesses that benefit from rural rate relief:

Ramsey Forty Foot, Ramsey Heights, Ramsey Mereside and Ramsey St Mary's

3.7 Details of the qualifying rural settlements are shown in APPENDIX A. A map of all settlements can be found in APPENDIX B, and maps of defined settlements are shown in APPENDIX C.

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

4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be circulated in advance of the Cabinet meeting.

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

4.2 The award of mandatory Rural Rate Relief to qualifying shops, pubs and petrol stations in rural settlements directly contributes to the priorities set out with the Corporate Plan to improve the quality of life for local people, and to create a better Huntingdonshire for future generations.

4.3 Providing business rates relief to eligible small businesses also aligns with the Huntingdon Futures Place Strategy, supporting vital community amenities in rural areas.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The Council has a legal duty to set and publish the rural settlements list by 31<sup>st</sup> December each year.

#### **7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Qualifying businesses are entitled to 100% mandatory relief on their business rates. To date in 2024, the existing Rural Settlements List has facilitated the award of £77,184.07 Rural Rate Relief to 38 qualifying businesses.

7.2 The delegation to the S151 Officer to approve future Rural Settlements Lists, in conjunction with the Executive Councillor for Resident Services and Corporate Performance, will ensure that future decisions in relation to

this matter are taken in the most efficient way, whilst also ensuring robust accountability and governance.

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

- 8.1 The proposed amendments to the Rural Settlement List ensures that the classification of urban, rural and defined settlements reflect the current population figures and rural rate relief is being awarded appropriately.

## **9. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix A – Rural Settlement List  
Appendix B – Settlement List Map  
Appendix C – Defined Areas Map

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

Name/Job Title: Katie Kelly / Revenues and Benefits Manager  
Tel No: 01480 388151  
Email: [katie.kelly@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:katie.kelly@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

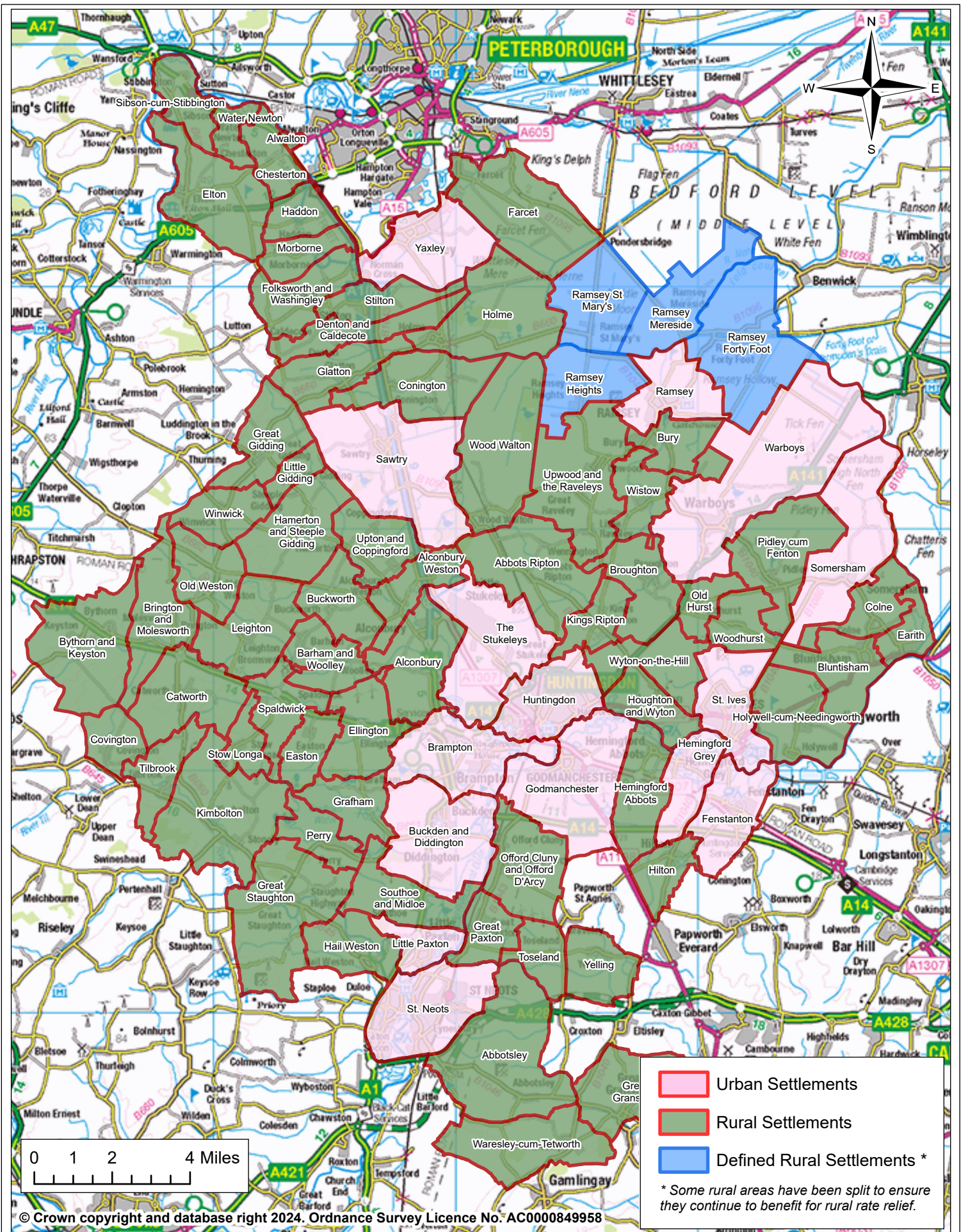
Proposed Rural Settlement List – Appendix 1

Abbotsley	Hemingford Abbots
Abbots Ripton	Hilton
Alconbury	Holme
Alconbury Weston	Holywell-cum-Needingworth
Alwalton	Houghton and Wyton
Barham and Woolley	Kimbolton and Stonely
Bluntisham	Kings Ripton
Brington and Molesworth	Leighton Bromswold
Broughton	Morborne
Buckworth	Offord Cluny & Offord D'Arcy
Bury	Old Hurst
Bythorn and Keyston	Old Weston
Catworth	Perry
Chesterton	Pidley-cum-Fenton
Colne	Ramsey Forty Foot*
Conington	Ramsey St Mary's*
Covington	Ramsey Mereside*
Denton and Caldecote	Ramsey Heights*
Earith	Sibson-cum-Stibbington
Easton	Southoe and Midloe
Ellington	Spaldwick
Elton	Stilton
Farcet	Stow Longa
Folksworth and Washingley	Tilbrook
Glatton	Toseland
Grafham	Upton and Coppingford
Great and Little Gidding	Upwood and the Raveleys
Great Gransden	Waresley-cum-Tetworth
Great Paxton	Water Newton
Great Staughton	Winwick
Haddon	Wistow
Hail Weston	Woodhurst
Hamerton and Steeple Gidding	Woodwalton
	Wyton-on-the-Hill
	Yelling

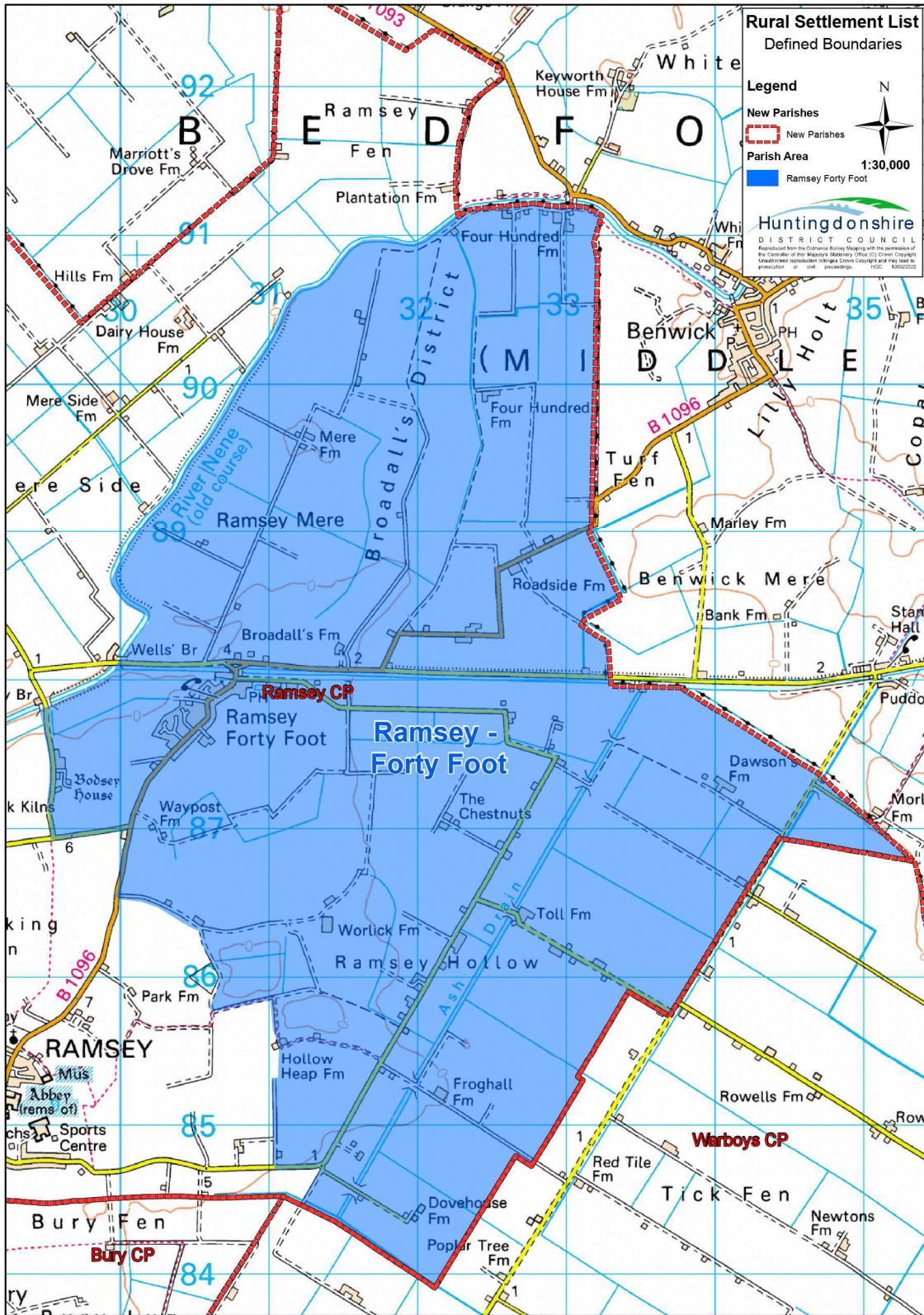
\* Defined rural settlement

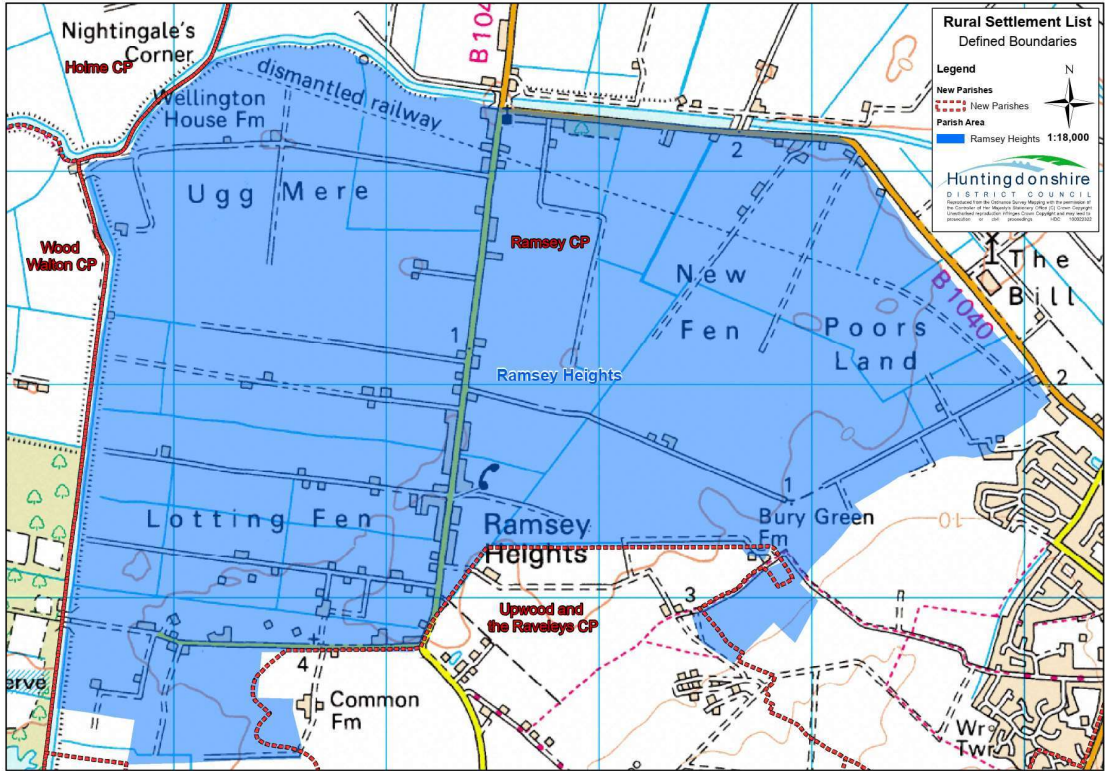
This page is intentionally left blank



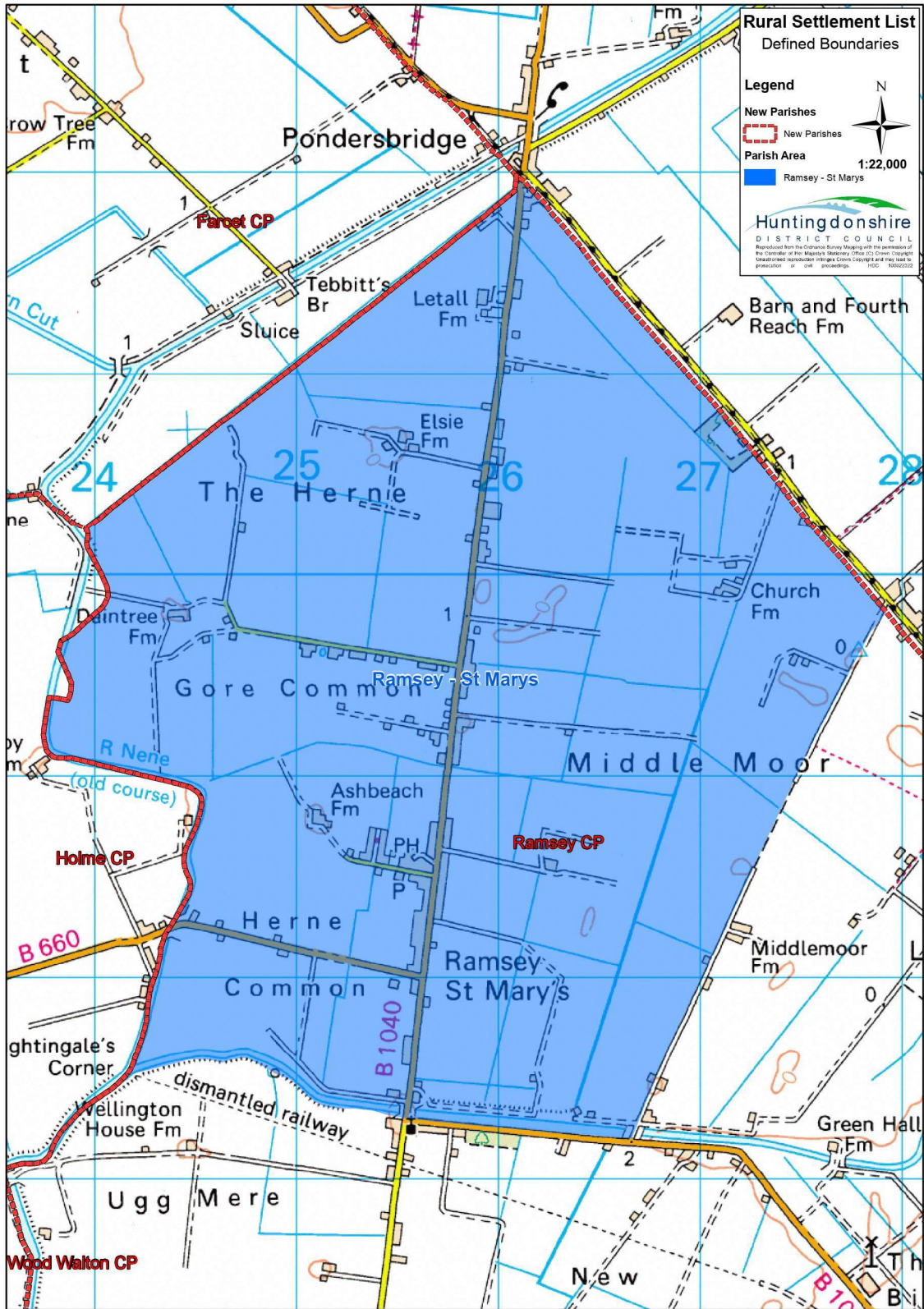


This page is intentionally left blank









## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP held in Countryside Centre, Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, PE29 6DB on Friday, 15 November 2024.

PRESENT: Councillor M L Beuttell – Chair.  
Councillors C Lowe, S L Taylor and D J Shaw.

APOLOGIES: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor K Billington.

IN ATTENDANCE: .

### 9. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 10. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

### 11. SENIOR RANGER'S REPORT

The Group received and noted the contents of the Head Ranger's report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and a PowerPoint presentation on park activities for the period July to October 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

#### Staffing

The new staffing structure within the Parks and Countryside Service was discussed, with particular attention drawn to the appointment of two Weekend Wardens which would relieve the requirement of a ranger presence within the park over the weekend. It was also noted that the appointment of a new Commercial Manager had been completed and that the appointment would be from the new year.

#### Volunteers

Volunteer engagement continued to successful over the period within corporate groups helping to fulfil different tasks.

#### Park management

Delays had been experienced to planned work due to flooding however the end date would still be achievable. It was clarified that green hay was hay which was immediately baled once cut, then moved to a receptor site where it was spread to dry when it was again

baled. This allowed for seeds, especially native species from the district, to be distributed into new areas. It was noted that the resulting hay was sold to a local farm for use with livestock.

It was reassured that a communications plan was in place to help spread the reasons behind recent tree felling within the park and the positives this would bring to the parks biodiversity. The Panel heard that alongside selling the resulting logs, the timber would also be processed through a sawmill to provide for future park projects.

### **Satellite Sites**

Following a discussion about the internal department restructure and the realignment of Head Ranger's duties, it was agreed that future ranger reports would focus solely on Hinchingsbrooke Country Park.

### **Café**

It was reported that a positive season had been completed and that the pizza van had been a worthwhile investment.

### **Events**

The introduction of trail packs at the park had received positive feedback and engagement whilst proving to be profitable for the park. The Wild about Huntingdonshire festival had been postponed due to flooding and adverse weather and was being rearranged for Spring 2025.

The Group heard that there would be a move during the festive season from the previous Santas Grotto to a breakfast event. Ticket sales were positive and this style of event would be easier to manage whilst works to the park and the building were in progress.

## **12. FINANCE REPORT**

The Group received and noted the contents of the Finance report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) for the period July to October 2024. In doing so, comment was made as follows:

The Group heard that there was a forecasted underspend of £77,000 within the budget due to the delays of the park redevelopment. It was advised that the figures would be monitored as the development got underway and re-forecasted as necessary.

## **13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Group is due to be held on 25th April 2025 at 10:00am.

Chair