

## 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, 21 April 2026.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Conboy – Chair.

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

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor S A Howell.

### **86. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **87. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

The Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer advised Cabinet about the position in relation to lobbying. It was at the time to be expected for Members to be lobbied on matters coming before Cabinet, and lobbying in itself did not prevent a Member from taking part in a decision. Members needed to ensure that they approached the decision with an open mind, taking into account the officer report, relevant legal duties, and all material considerations. Any Member who had been lobbied should declare that fact for the sake of transparency. If any Member considered that, as a result of lobbying or otherwise, they had formed a settled view and could not approach this matter with an open mind, she advised that they should declare that and withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item, taking no part in the discussion or decision.

In respect of Minute No. 25/89, Councillor Conboy placed on record that she had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, had declined an invitation to its AGM, and confirmed she approached the item with an open mind.

In respect of Minute No. 25/89, Councillor Sanderson placed on record that he had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, but confirmed he approached the item with an open mind.

In respect of Minute No. 25/89 Councillor Harvey placed on record that she had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, but confirmed she approached the item with an open mind.

In respect of Minute Nos. 25/88 and 25/89, Councillor Mickelburgh placed on record that he had received an email from the Chair of the

Great Ouse Valley Trust, as well as emails relating to Planning matters, but confirmed he approached both items with an open mind.

In respect of Minute No. 25/89 Councillor Davenport-Ray placed on record that she had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, but confirmed she approached the item with an open mind.

In respect of Minute No.25/89, Councillor Ferguson placed on record that he had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, but confirmed he approached the item with an open mind. He also placed on record that when he was Mayor of St Neots in October 2020, he took part in a charity walk along the Ouse Valley Way and raised money for and donated to the Mayor's Charities, which included the Great Ouse Valley Trust. However, this did not influence his position in respect of the debate and decision.

In respect of Minute No. 25/89, Councillor Wakeford placed on record that he had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, but confirmed he approached the item with an open mind.

In respect of Minute No. 25/89, Councillor Kerr placed on record that she had received an email from the Chair of the Great Ouse Valley Trust, but chose not to read it. She confirmed she approached the item with an open mind.

## **88. HOUSING STRATEGY 2026/2031**

A report by the Head of Economy, Regeneration and Housing Delivery was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) setting out the strategic direction for housing in Huntingdonshire for the next five years.

The Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing, Councillor Wakeford introduced the report, and made reference to the discussion at the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth), particularly around the importance of accessibility and affordability in relation to Housing, which had been a core part of the team's work in supporting the production of the new Local Plan, to ensure the Council was steering as much as possible on the Housing the District needed.

In response to questions from the Cabinet, Executive Councillor for Jobs, Economy and Housing advised that it was important to ensure there was a strategic basis in place for Housing work, and to pull more levers to improve the Housing situation for residents. The Strategy included information that was contributing to the development of the new Local Plan and setting the context of the team's engagement with the new Local Plan review process.

The Cabinet commended the report and noted the concerns of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth) with respect to rural deliverability. Members made reference to the importance of accessibility adaptability of Housing, particularly in Social Housing, and the improvements to the Disabled Facilities Grants process.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that

- (1) the contents of the report, be noted; and
- (2) the New Housing Strategy and Action Plan, be noted.

**89. SELF-DESIGNATION OF THE GREAT OUSE VALLEY WAY**

A report by the Place and Climate Lead was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing an update on partnership working with the Great Ouse Valley Trust (GOVT) and outlining the case for self-designation of the GOV and Washes as a national landscape, based on the outputs derived from a jointly commissioned piece of work undertaken by Arkwood.

The Leader, Councillor Conboy introduced the report.

The Cabinet commented that GOVW had seen a decline due to Local Government austerity and noted that for much of the year the route was inaccessible without hard-working volunteers and HDC Rangers. Concerns were raised regarding the effects the various options Local Government Reorganisation could present which would have an effect on the GOVW.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Leader advised that the question was how and what the right way to move forward was, and the Council could look at potential partners to work and move forward with now, ahead of the next administration. Furthermore, recommendation B was in the “Enable” and “Influence” space, and there may be partners who were well placed to bring value to the table.

The Cabinet noted that the GOVW was valuable environmentally and economically, and underlined that the wording of recommendation 5(a) was to not proceed “at this time”, as opposed to perpetually, but it may be looked at going forward by a new administration.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce, Councillor Davenport-Ray proposed the following additional recommendation, which was duly seconded by Councillor Ferguson:

“to note the findings of the Arkwood Report and the great advantages in a self-designated Great Ouse Valley for the health, biodiversity, landscape and, most importantly, the economy of our region”.

When put to the vote, the additional recommendation was carried and would therefore form part of the substantive motion.

The Executive Councillor for Climate, Transformation and Workforce confirmed it was her hope that this type of wording would be considered in the formal letter to the GOVT, referenced in recommendation 5(b).

The Chair moved to the vote on the substantive motion.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that

- (1) the Cabinet has reviewed and commented on the document entitled 'Arkwood Report' which sets out the rationale, options and implications of pursuing self-designation for the Great Ouse Valley and Washes;
- (2) the financial and resource commitments required to progress this work, including the significant Officer time need for coordination, engagement and governance development, be noted;
- (3) the majority of the Ouse Valley Way lies outside Huntingdonshire's administrative boundary, requiring cross-authority collaboration and limiting the HDC's direct influence, be noted;
- (4) uncertainties arising from forthcoming local government reorganisation, including the lack of clarity on future revenue streams and HDC's ability to resource this work sustainably over the medium term, be noted;
- (5) agreed
  - (a) that HDC should not proceed with further, detailed work with the GOVT in respect of self-designation at this time for the reasons set out in this report. As such, HDC limits its involvement to limited activities relating to partnership and collaboration with the GOVT based on the principles of Influence and Enable within the Corporate Plan;
  - (b) that authority be delegated to the Place and Climate Lead in consultation with the Executive Leader, to formally write to the GOVT, to outline the position and thank them for their partnership and engagement to date, to provide confirmation that HDC recognises the value of the GOV within Huntingdonshire as a result of the various contributory formal designations (e.g. ecological and heritage) and its relationship with our Place ambitions, and to advise that HDC will continue to collaborate with them on the basis of the "Enable" and "Influence" principles from the Corporate Plan; and
    - (b.i) to note the findings of the Arkwood Report and the great advantages in a self-designated Great Ouse Valley for the health, biodiversity, landscape and, most importantly, the economy of our region.

The Cabinet placed on record its thanks to all staff for their support over the previous four years, particularly amidst the many unexpected challenges and unforeseen circumstances that had arisen. The Cabinet also thanked Councillors across the Council who had worked

tirelessly for the greater good of Huntingdonshire and in contributing to valuable debate and discussions. Furthermore, the Cabinet thanked the Leader, Councillor Conboy for her leadership and in particular for her input in helping to design Option E with respect to Local Government Reorganisation.

Chair