

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Approval of updated Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 19th September 2019

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Growth

Report by: Planning Service Manager (Growth)

Wards affected: All

Executive Summary:

Following updates to the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) on Neighbourhood Planning and the adoption of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036, both in May 2019, revisions to the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide were necessary. The revisions provide further depth to the guidance on amending or updating a neighbourhood plan; highlight new technical and financial support available when producing various supporting documents or assessments to a neighbourhood plan; detailing the documents that arise from any EU obligations which are triggered; minor updates to weblinks; and formatting. The report sets out these in greater detail, as well as some background to neighbourhood planning and the current situation of neighbourhood planning in the district.

Recommendation:

That Cabinet:

- Endorses the updated Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide at Appendix 1 for publication.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets the background to what has been updated in the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide, why it is necessary and the positive benefits this has for neighbourhood planning groups in the district. The attached guide provides up to date guidance and resources available to neighbourhood planning groups when producing their neighbourhood plan and assists them in meeting the basic conditions. The report includes some introductory information on neighbourhood plans, it also addresses the importance of updating this guide and the current status of neighbourhood planning in the district.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Neighbourhood planning was introduced in the Localism Act 2011 and gives communities direct power to develop a vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.
- 2.2 In order for a neighbourhood plan to be made, the plan must meet nationally specified basic conditions: that it is in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the strategic policies of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036; that it contributes to sustainable development; and meets any EU obligations. After consultation, the plan can be examined by an independent examiner who decides whether the plan can be made (usually with some modifications). If the plan meets the basic conditions the plan can proceed to referendum. If approved at referendum, the plan can be made and adopted as part of the Huntingdonshire Development Plan and become a material consideration when determining planning applications in that area.
- 2.3 Three neighbourhood plans have already been made: St Neots (2016), Godmanchester (2017) and Houghton and Wyton (2018). The Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan is scheduled to proceed to referendum on 19 September 2019. Ten other neighbourhood plans are currently being prepared. Consultation on Grafham and Ellington's joint neighbourhood plan designation ended on 23 August 2019; this is the Council's first joint neighbourhood plan. Full details on the timelines of each neighbourhood plan can be found in the Council's document Neighbourhood Planning in Huntingdonshire.
- 2.4 Clearly, there is an appetite for neighbourhood planning in the district, and providing up to date guidance through a step by step approach in the Council's Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide is key to sustain this and support neighbourhood groups through the neighbourhood plan process.
- 2.5 The Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide was first published in 2015 with several small scale updates since (listed in the document information section of the guide). The scale of the updates this time is more substantial reflecting adoption of the Local Plan to 2036 and greater NPPG updates. The main changes are detailed below:

- Updates to how a neighbourhood plan can be updated or refreshed (pages 32-33 of the guide) – paragraph 106 (reference ID: 41-106-20190509) of the NPPG now includes three ways in which a neighbourhood plan can be updated and provides guidance on the level of examination required. Providing this information in the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide is essential, especially for Town and Parish Councils with made neighbourhood plans who over time may wish to update their plans.
- The addition of the ‘Technical Support’ package by Locality and updates to the financial support available as a result (page 14, 20 and 22 of the guide) – all groups writing a neighbourhood plan are eligible to apply for up to £9,000 in a neighbourhood planning grant still. The ‘Technical Support’ package, however offers additional financial support to groups facing particularly complex issues who may be eligible for a further £8,000 grant if looking to carry out extra assessments such as design codes or a housing needs assessment, allocating land for development or attempting to bring forward affordable housing. This is particularly important to include so that neighbourhood planning groups are aware of the support available to them when going through this process and the sorts of studies that can be done alongside the plan to support it.
- Details on further EU obligations (other than the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)) – the inclusion of further information on Habitat Regulation Assessments (HRA), Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Habitats and Wild Bird Directives on pages 12 and 13 of the guide. This information makes neighbourhood groups aware of the potential assessments that may arise depending on whether any of these EU obligations are triggered. The update also clarifies that support is available from HDC’s Planning Policy Team in completing both the SEA and HRA screening process.
- The inclusion of HDC producing an indicative housing requirement figure for neighbourhood plan groups who ask for such information (page 22 of the guide) – this follows updates to paragraph 009 (reference ID: 41-009-20190509) of the NPPG whereby this figure can be used to support allocations in the neighbourhood plan.
- Removal of all references to the draft Local Plan or Core Strategy. These have been superseded by the adoption of the Local Plan to 2036 which includes all of HDC’s strategic policies.
- Removal of the Community Planning proposals policy in Community Planning Tools section following the adoption of the Local Plan where the policy was removed.

3. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS / OPTIONS

- 3.1 The key risk to not endorsing this updated version of the Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide is that neighbourhood plan groups are

not provided with guidance and resources that are up to date. This has implications on the productivity of these groups in preparing plans that best meet their needs and the basic conditions.

- 3.2 The risk to HDC is that is a number of plans were to commence simultaneously this would put undue pressure on our teams, in terms of timescales and resource.

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

- 4.1 The update to the Neighbourhood and Community Planning guide relates to the strategic objective “Develop stronger and more resilient communities to enable people to help themselves.”

Our work programme includes:

- *“Support community planning including working with parishes to complete Neighbourhood and Parish Plans.”*

5 COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The Panel received a report on the approval of the updated Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide at their meeting on 3rd September 2019.
- 5.2 The necessity of presenting what is, as some Members deem it to be, a technical guide to Overview and Scrutiny was questioned. In response, it was stated that the reasons for presenting the guide to the Panel was that; it is open and transparent to do so and that Members’ input is desired.
- 5.3 A question arose over the purpose of the guide, although it was confirmed that the guide is designed to assist Town and Parish Councils in developing their neighbourhood plans.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 HDC are required under paragraph 3 of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) to provide advice or assistance to neighbourhood groups or town/parish councils wishing to carry out neighbourhood plans or orders.
- 6.2 Paragraph 022 (reference ID: 41-022-20150209) of the NPPG states that Local Authorities should be proactive in providing information to communities about neighbourhood planning.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The production of the updated guide was completed by Planning Policy Officers at HDC. Up to date guidance will reduce the time needed in

answering queries from neighbourhood planning groups improving efficiency.

8 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

8.1 To provide up to date guidance and resources to neighbourhood planning groups when preparing their neighbourhood plans.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#)

[Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\) – Neighbourhood Planning](#)

[HDC's Neighbourhood Planning in Huntingdonshire \(regularly updated\)](#)

[Paragraph 3 of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 \(as amended\)](#)

APPENDICES:

Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide

CONTACT OFFICER

Name/Job Title: Natalie Elworthy, Assistant Planning Policy Officer
Tel No: 01480 388434
Email: natalie.elworthy@huntingdonshire.gov.uk