

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

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Prospectus' for Growth – Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey

**Meeting/Date:** Cabinet – 13th February 2020

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Housing, Planning and Economic Development – Councillor Ryan Fuller

**Report by:** Services Manager – Growth

**Wards affected:** All wards in and surrounding Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey

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### **Executive Summary:**

Following on from the recommendation in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough independent economic review [CPIER](#) (published in September 2018) to create a market town strategy (Section 8.1) work has been undertaken to develop a “prospectus for growth” (hereafter referred to as PFG) across three more market towns in Huntingdonshire.

[The St Neots Masterplan for growth](#) (June 2018) is underway and during 2019 the next tranche of work has been formed and shaped to focus on the market towns of Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey.

These reports, commissioned by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) have been written by Manchester based consultancy Metro Dynamics, who also authored CPIER for the CPCA. These reports have been shaped by means of regular engagement between the consultants, CPCA, the town teams and specialist / senior officers at HDC. In addition, Cambridge Ahead, helped facilitate a workshop in November '19, attended by key stakeholders from the Cambridge economy. (Appendix 5)

The work relating to these reports commenced in Spring 2019. These reports individually aim to address the current challenges facing each market town, conceptualise future opportunities that can be developed, whilst preserving and enhancing each respective place's heritage and identity.

These reports will be presented to the CPCA board on the 25th March for approval. Once approved, the prospectus for growth (PFG) reports will provide the framework for delivery, as part of the CPCA's masterplan strategy which aims to ensure that all market towns in Cambridgeshire are connected to help support the region's future prosperity.

**Recommendations:**

The Cabinet is

**RECOMMENDED**

to endorse support for on the attached draft reports (appendices 1, 2 and 3) and delegate authority to finalise the Council's final comments on these reports to the Service Manager - Growth, in consultation with the Executive Leader and Deputy Executive Leader, Managing Director and Corporate Director (Place).

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

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an understanding of the prospectus for growth for Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey.
- 1.2 For ease the report provides:
  - An overview of how this work compliments other strategic economic reports
  - A summary of the key points of each town's PFG
  - The pathway taken to finalise each PFG report
  - An understanding of how this activity fits into the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 2036 or any successor document
- 1.3 The report is accompanied by the following:
  - Appendix 1- PFG Huntingdon
  - Appendix 2 – PFG St. Ives
  - Appendix 3 – PFG Ramsey

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the respective local authorities all want each of the market towns in the County (11 of them, 4 of which are in Huntingdonshire) to be vibrant and thriving places in their own right. The CPIER recognised the important role that towns do and can make in the success of the wider area.
- 2.2 Following the production of the St Neots Masterplan, which was led by the Combined Authority, the 'plans' for the remaining towns is led by the respective District Councils with funding from the Combined Authority. Following the engagement of Metrodynamics the project for Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey launched at the beginning of May 2019 and will be presented to the March CPCA board on the 25th. At the time of drafting this report a further Town Team session with the CPCA Mayor is programmed for each town on the 30th January. An update on the outcome of those meetings will be provided on or before the Panel meets.
- 2.3 Work to date has focussed on ensuring we have a sound understanding of potential strengths and opportunities in each town and has involved data analysis; workshops with teams from each of the three towns, the District Council and CPCA; and targeted engagement with organisations on identified issues and opportunities.
- 2.4 Through the development of the PFGs opportunities were identified and developed – physical interventions including connectivity (transport and digital), sector specialisms, as well as wider issues such as skills and health – and these continue to be tested as part of a wider engagement process. The purpose of these prospectuses is to focus on transformational, game-changing interventions that can make the most of opportunities unique to each town and its community, creating new jobs,

improving productivity and raising aspirations in and around each town. Some are quick wins but others will be longer term objectives.

- 2.5 These Prospectuses, when finalised, will look to set out a consensus of the opportunities in each town and the interventions required to unlock them, and enable partners to work together to then secure the support, including financial support, required to deliver them.
- 2.6 The prospectus for growth reports form part of the CPCA's market towns strategy which was one of the key recommendations of [CPIER](#).
- 2.7 The CPCA wish for all eleven market towns to be interconnected as part of a plan to enable future prosperity for Cambridgeshire.
- 2.8 A detailed report of each market town will allow appropriate development options to be considered which can enable local economic growth, preserve identity and enhance heritage opportunities.
- 2.9 Appendices 1-3 are in draft form only at the time of drafting this report and the commentary below reflects the summary of the drafts and the input of officers.

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

#### **3.1 Huntingdon's Consultation was structured upon four areas:**

- Town centre
- Edge of town centre
- North Huntingdon
- Alconbury Weald

Town centre.

- 3.2 The opening statements in this report speak about Huntingdon's town square being a focal point. About developing the towns historical connections to bring increased visitor numbers. Enabling this space to encourage people to dwell. Cultural activity, the visitor economy and a re-vitalised evening economy with cafes bars and restaurants spilling out into the streets, especially during the summertime is the vision put forward. There is also the suggestion to make better use of vacant and poorly used space within the town centre by densifying the town centre. Accommodation designs would be aimed at both young professionals and older couples to drive up the population. This in turn would support and help drive the economy in the town centre.

Officer response:

- 3.3 We are mindful that the idea of linking the use of Wykeham House to the heritage of Cromwell and Huntingdon's historic past may be driven by the agenda of the Town council. There may be a limit to the Town's ability to support an acceleration of the evening economy, but redeveloping and re-purposing poorly used space in the St Benedict's Court and Bus

Station areas will have a key part to play. We also feel there may be opportunities for a Start-up incubator or KIBS space.

Edge Of Huntingdon.

- 3.4 The reports commentary speaks of transformation from taking a noisy and congested environment into one that allows expansion of the Town centre by creating attractive gateways for visitors. Observations are made around the “sense of arrival” at Huntingdon train station and the improvements that could be made. The ring road which acts as a collar, restricting natural growth and expansion. The river frontage is noted as being a natural asset which is currently underutilised for the benefit of the town unlike St Ives and arguably St Neots. The example of Hebden bridge is given which is seen as an opportunity to change the image of Huntingdon to make it a more attractive place which could bring in further investment. By intervening in the above three areas, this would allow for more active travel choices for walkers and cyclists creating health opportunities for people working and living in Huntingdon.

Officer response:

- 3.5 We asked simply about visitor moorings at Purvis marina at this stage but the consultants see the river as an key leisure opportunity, to centre “an offer” for the town. We have also highlighted the common lands and meadows and significance of the Ouse valley which have now been noted with associated eco-leisure activities but by giving these green zones a stronger identity we can act appropriately. Are the green zones there for ecological purposes or simply to separate the town centre from residential areas further away from the town?

North Huntingdon

- 3.6 This is seen as an area where the population will grow with increased employment and educational opportunity. Local stakeholder relationships are noted as playing a key role to help develop the community to ensure they can live, work and maximise greater health opportunities. The new community centre is seen as a significant community asset as is the continuing relationship with the developing Oxmoor programme. It is noted that interventions to create more healthy food choices and collaborations amongst stakeholders such as allotment growers, the grub hub and the regional college’s catering operation could create positive outcomes. Access to services via digital technology is seen as another opportunity with on-street Wi-Fi provision and access to training for those with lower digital skills.

Officer response:

- 3.7 An earlier draft of this report regarding healthy food choice was centred around a new and perhaps smaller supermarket within the Oxmoor, the viability of which we are not convinced by, given the number of supermarkets already present in Huntingdon. The opportunity to raise aspirations by means of education or employment and skills has been

completely missed in this element of the report. We would like to see more language around Huntingdon being a good place to both live and work and if Alconbury Weald is the place to provide these opportunities then a narrative around transport and infrastructure from North Huntingdon to Alconbury Weald would be helpful. We have economic data that spells out significant future growth in the digital sector in Hunts, this could link into investigating the expansion of “coding clubs” activity. One of which currently runs at Huntingdon Primary School.

#### Alconbury Weald

- 3.8 The enterprise zone at Alconbury Weald is described as a hub for companies in hi-tech sectors such as advanced manufacturing. Essentially this is a place that will provide the jobs of the future. The enterprise zone is the big growth opportunity for Huntingdonshire and the relationship it plays with Huntingdon and personnel at sites such as RAF Alconbury should be complementary. There are ambitions to expedite connectivity, initially with a guided bus which will morph into the Cambridge Autonomous Metro (CAM). Alconbury weald will be a location for business tourism, promoting key sectors and attracting businesses from the rest of the UK and abroad.

Officer response:

- 3.9 We asked the consultants to shape and provide case study material regarding business tourism which is a recently developed strategy of Central Government (Appendix 7). We wanted to understand what any emerging activity in this sector could look like at Alconbury Weald.

#### **St Ives Consultation was structured upon four areas:**

- A hub for innovative business
- Wyton Airfield
- A connected town with strong East-West links
- Public realm of the highest quality

A hub for innovative business

- 3.10 It is proposed that over time, that St Ives will become a vital component of the wider Cambridge economy, creating highly skilled jobs with good wages which will grow the economy of the town. Creating the environment for this to happen means enabling space for businesses to grow and succeed. By re-purposing land in St Ives town centre, an Innovation Hub is proposed, a development comprising business, retail and accommodation to suit younger workers and designed with active travel choices in mind. To enable this type of facility to flourish, effective networks will be established to include innovation champions which will act as “nodes”. The innovation champions will be deliberately selected from appropriate “Cambridge Networks”.

Wyton airfield as a strategic site

- 3.11 St Ives is the nearest market town to RAF Wyton and the airfield is no longer in use. We are encouraged to think further about the strategic potential for this site.

Officer response:

- 3.12 EMSI (Appendix 6) tells us that the digital sector is likely to be one of the strongest growing sectors in our local economy in the coming years. Overall, we believe there were approx. 120 business who registered for the first time in 2019 in the PE27 area against a total population of businesses of approx. 900 within this postcode. It will be important to investigate the concept of the hub against further business profiling to understand how the innovation hub, innovation champions and strategic site can best interact with one another. Wyton airfield – housing at scale as per the HLP 2036

A connected town with strong East-West links

- 3.13 The report states that economic potential in St Ives can be released by relieving transport constraints in multiple directions. This includes strengthening the guided busway infrastructure in both directions by offering express services to Cambridge and Huntingdon with a long-term vision of the guided busway morphing into the CAM. Improved connectivity across the Gt Ouse via a third river crossing and a review of Harrison Way at the junction where it meets the A1123. The consultants also feel that St Ives, with its rich association with cycling dating back to 1877 could become the “Cycling capital of Cambridgeshire”

Officer response:

- 3.14 We have stressed throughout this process that a third river crossing should be built for the benefit of the wider area, not just for the benefit of St Ives or Huntingdonshire. We have shaped these ideas to nurture higher rates of long-term economic growth, but we also recognise that this should be balanced, by encouraging cars off the road to reduce congestion. This will provide improved health opportunities, air quality and active travel choices.

Public realm of the highest quality

- 3.15 Metro dynamics have position public realm by the definition defined by English Heritage. This definition defines all public spaces where the public has free access as well as the space in between buildings.
- 3.16 They argue that the difference between towns where it is pleasant to dwell, and the opposite is the use of public realm. Poor public realm can be characterised by a lack of “sense of place” an overabundance of cars (moving and parked) and a lack of green space.
- 3.17 In St Ives, the ideas put forward point to ensuring pedestrian priority in the Town Centre with a view to working to full pedestrian in selected areas. There is also a feeling that the mews in St Ives could provide an

enhanced experience for those dwelling and spending time in the town centre. Developing digital technologies such as on-street Wi-Fi could enable e-commerce opportunities for the towns independent retailers and support flexible working which could attract freelancers. Other innovations supporting walking and cycling could become apparent as well. It is recommended that the town should have footfall counters installed to help monitor the progress of any upgrade to the public realm.

- 3.18 There is also a recommendation to encourage more boater traffic to St Ives.

Officer response:

- 3.19 The case study described (Cobden Chambers Nottingham) utilised a vacant shop grant, that is no longer available. Therefore, we must be mindful that any commitment made to upgrade the public realm is achievable, manageable and in line with improvement schemes / funding that can realistically be leveraged and achieved.

- 3.20 The Ramsey consultation was structured upon six areas. Three cited as strengths and the remaining three as weaknesses.

Strengths

- Heritage
- Waterways
- Community Spirit

- 3.21 Weaknesses

- Connectivity / Isolation
- Health Outcomes
- Employment

Strengths

Heritage

- 3.22 The Key proposal placed forward by Metro Dynamics is the restoration of Abbey House as the major heritage asset for Ramsey to help establish and grow its tourism activity. There are several issues set around the current lease to Ramsey Abbey School, the investment needed to restore the house to enable a change of use. And then the question of who might take on the building next?

Officer response:

- 3.23 We have questioned whether the family and school willing partners in this idea, which we understand they are.

Waterways

- 3.24 Another major recommendation is to restore the Great Whyte Watercourse back to its former use by removing the culvert (the road)



which currently covers this feature. Since 2012, Approx. £1.2 Million has been spent by CCC maintain the culvert. There is footfall data to support the argument that people currently shop and visit Ramsey stopping briefly. This intervention is designed to create a feature to encourage “dwell time” in the town for resident and visitors. There are green shoots mentioned, suggesting the high street is starting to adapt to change and this intervention intends to encourage more café culture in line with the experience economy. There are other interventions mentioned around developing access to the Great Fen and bringing more boater traffic to Ramsey.

Officer response:

- 3.25 We have asked the consultants to provide evidence of their discussions about daylighting the Great Whyte with highways, environment agency and Middle level commissioners (Appendix 4) We have also asked about the size of the waterway and mentioned the relationship with HGV traffic using this area of the town. The consultants believe the open river and infrastructure surrounding it will help calm traffic and discourage use by companies.

Community Spirit

- 3.26 As a result of the Ramsey Million project which started in 2012, people in Ramsey have started “working together” instead of “overlapping” generating a feeling of positivity. The consultants feel that in the face of population challenges, Ramsey’s community spirit can play a central part to help future proof the community. It is by creating a welcoming community and embedding newcomers to that community, is an approach that could work. Developers are taking interest in Ramsey and securing housing would be the principal solution to a decline in population.
- 3.27 The ageing population is also a challenge in Ramsey. Building on some of the local schemes that have already reached out to the elderly and vulnerable is the task ahead. The case study evidenced, illustrates how loneliness could be tackled but physical infrastructure and transport connectivity including the bus network have also been identified as issues for this demographic.
- 3.28 There are questions over the Ramsey Million scheme post 2023 – based around funding but it is recommended that the Discover Ramsey website is kept running to support the heritage and volunteer events.

Weaknesses

Connectivity / Isolation

- 3.29 Ramsey is currently too remote across many different modes of connectivity. Making the status quo work in the long term is deemed unsustainable so exploring new options to improve connectivity are recommended.

- 3.30 Innovative Full Fibre Cycleways with the facility to have fibre cables placed into them is one option described along with a better model for the bus network. Long-term modelling a by-pass than strengthens the high street rather than damaging it is noted as well as a HGV covenant which some businesses including G's Fresh have already signed up to.

Officer response:

- 3.31 The wider issue of connectivity also touches skills, how will students who leave Ramsey Abbey travel to FE institutions. Business, skills, connectivity and infrastructure have a symbiotic relationship.

Health Outcomes

- 3.32 Health is a challenge in Ramsey, weight and diabetes are of concern. If we want everyone to live healthy lives, we need to enable people to make healthy choices. The consultants remark that other elements of this report promote good health. Cycleways, restoring the waterway which is proven to encourage good mental health and counteracting the link between loneliness and isolation.

- 3.33 This section talks about direct interventions in light of CPIER recommendation #9 - An opportunity area for health and specifically mental health and active lifestyles. There is commentary about widening healthy food choices on the high street and improving the cycling infrastructure.

Officer response:

- 3.34 There is a narrative throughout the various PFG reports about cycling and infrastructure which will enable healthy and active travel choices. There is an opportunity to re-balance the high street offer in light of the high proportion of take-away food outlets in the town.

Employment

- 3.35 It is commented that more employment opportunities are needed to be created in Ramsey as more residential development occurs. Out-commuting is accepted but more employment opportunity should also be created. The Ramsey Gateway site is seen as key for creating employment and it is recommended that the Combined Authority and Hunts DC identify potential businesses to ensure the commercial development (second phase) occurs, not just the first phase which is retail.

- 3.36 Lifelong learning to benefit school age children seeking A levels and NVQ's and employees requiring training and upskilling opportunities.

Officer response:

- 3.37 Ramsey Gateway has been sold on to new ownership from the original local developers. Why? Prior to identifying businesses wishing to move to Ramsey, it may be prudent to understand why the original developers decided to pass on this opportunity. We may learn in the process if the site is deemed an attractive offering to commercial businesses. We have identified skills as a missing piece of the current jigsaw in Ramsey, more information around outcomes and ambition would add value.
- 3.38 The summaries above are based on draft documents (available at the time of writing this report). Each PFG report sets out to understand what makes each of these towns unique. What we may wish them to look like in ten, twenty, even fifty years' time. It asks what are the big things that need to happen to secure a prosperous future for the residents in each town
- 3.39 These PFG reports aim to set out a vision for each place and provide an overview of what each town is like. Metro Dynamics have achieved this by working with partners in each location and drawing on a broad analysis of all available data.
- 3.40 Together these lead to a list of key priorities in each market town, which if acted upon, provide an opportunity to transform Huntingdon, St Ives & Ramsey.

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

- 4.1 The comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Performance and Growth) will be presented in a separate appendix prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

#### **5. CONSULTATION DETAIL AND OFFICER RESPONSE**

- 5.1 These are not consultation documents but it is important that HDC, as a key stakeholder in the development of these documents, alongside the town teams, are engaged and support the wider agendas for Huntingdon, St. Ives and Ramsey.
- 5.2 It is important to note that HDC is one of many stakeholders with a shared interest in the ambition to improve economic prosperity within our towns but the responsibility to delivery the ambition of PFGs does not rest solely with HDC.

#### **6. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 6.1 This information is being sought from the CPCA. Approval of the final PFG reports is expected at the CPCA's board meeting in March with a delivery programme to be shaped thereafter.

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

- 7.1 The Corporate Plan includes a work programme and actions that include:

- Supporting new and growing businesses and promoting business success
- Supporting economic growth in market towns and rural areas
- Influencing the development of the Highways and Transport Infrastructure Strategy
- Facilitating the delivery of infrastructure to support housing growth
- Improve the supply of new and affordable housing, jobs and community facilities to meet current and future need
- Support people to improve their health and well-being

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None. This is a CPCA document and not a statutory document for plan making purposes.

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

9.1 To ensure the PFG accurately reflect our future ambitions for the towns of Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey.

9.2 Supporting the CPCA's business plan stating that each Market Town will have a plan setting out future economic growth potential and highlighting the strategic intervention.

9.3 These reports compliment recommendations made in [CPIER](#). and the [Local Industrial Strategy](#) for Huntingdonshire.

9.4 Considering the above, it is recommended that:

The Cabinet is recommended to endorse support for on the attached reports (appendices 1, 2 and 3) and delegate authority to finalise the Council's final comments on these reports to the Service manager – Growth, in consultation with the Executive Leader and Deputy Executive Leader, Managing Director and Corporate Director (Place).

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

Appendix 1 – Prospectus for growth Huntingdon

Appendix 2 – Prospectus for growth St Ives

Appendix 3 – Prospectus for growth Ramsey

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

### **CPIER**

<https://www.cpier.org.uk/media/1672/cpier-report-151118-lowres.pdf>

### **Local Industrial Strategy**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818886/Cambridge\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf)

## **Huntingdonshire Local Plan**

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/3872/final-adopted-local-plan-to-2036.pdf>

## **Public Realm Definition**

[https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Public\\_realm](https://www.designingbuildings.co.uk/wiki/Public_realm)

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