

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document: Consultation Draft 2021

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 14th October 2021

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning

Report by: Strategic Growth Manager

Ward(s) affected: All

Executive Summary:

The Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD): Consultation Draft 2021 attached as Appendix 1 is an update and expansion of the Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD adopted in 2007. Such an update was required as since 2007 there have been several changes in national and local policy (including the National Planning Policy Framework, Localism Act and the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036) as well as developments that have changed the Huntingdonshire landscape and townscapes across the district.

SPDs are a material consideration in planning decisions and provide further detail to policies in the Local Plan. This revised SPD will therefore support the delivery of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 by:

1. guiding the preparation and consideration of planning applications to enhance the quality of new development within Huntingdonshire; and
2. providing a methodology for neighbourhood planning groups to produce their own landscape and townscape assessments to support policies within neighbourhood plans.

As well as incorporating changes to the natural and built environment since 2007 and reflecting changes in policy, the underlying theme of the revised SPD is how landscape and townscape issues should be considered as an integral part of the design and development process to support the wildlife, habitat, cultural and historical values of defined character areas and particular environments so that developments respond positively to their landscape and townscape context.

To support neighbourhood planning and local communities, the revised SPD includes a methodology for local communities to assess landscape and townscape character. This is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

The revised SPD is accompanied by an [interactive map](#). Further details and a user guide for this have been provided in Appendix 3. The interactive map enables neighbourhood plan groups, local residents, agents and planning officers to better navigate and access the information and apply the guidance within the revised SPD.

The next stage in the preparation of the SPD is to publicly consult on the full draft before it can be adopted.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is

RECOMMENDED

To approve the Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document: Consultation Draft 2021 for public consultation.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out what the Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is, the rationale for updating it, the areas of change between the existing and revised documents, how it will support the implementation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and how it can be used as a tool to empower local communities across the district to undertake such assessments themselves in support of locally specific design, landscape, conservation and heritage policies within neighbourhood plans.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD was adopted in 2007 following public consultation. It reports the findings of Landscape Design Associates who were appointed to undertake a Landscape and Townscape Assessment of Huntingdonshire in 2001 to provide a description and analysis of the landscape of the district, the typical building types found throughout Huntingdonshire and the assessment of the townscapes of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives, Ramsey and Godmanchester. This assessment drew on information in the Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines which were adopted by the Council as supplementary planning guidance in 1991. It was published as a supplementary planning document in June 2007 to give it greater weight in the determination of planning applications.
- 2.2 Since its adoption in 2007, there have been changes in national and local policy including the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG); neighbourhood planning under the Localism Act (2011); the adoption of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (May 2019) which sets out policies and a development strategy for the future growth of the district; and the adoption of the Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD (2017) providing detailed guidance on design matters for the district. Most recently, there is increasing emphasis on development being locally specific as seen in the Government's National Design Guide and Code. These illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, healthy, greener, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice. They form part of the Government's collection of planning practice guidance to achieve high quality places and buildings which is a key element of the NPPF.
- 2.3 Furthermore, the landscape and townscape features of areas have altered since 2007 through residential, employment and mixed-use developments, renewable energy proposals such as solar farms and major transport infrastructure projects like the A14 improvement works and further projects involving the A428 and East-West Rail.
- 2.4 Therefore, these factors justified a comprehensive review and update to the guidance provided within the Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD.

3. PURPOSE OF THE REVISED SPD

- 3.1 The revised SPD will update and expand existing landscape and townscape guidance incorporating changes to the natural and built environment since 2007 and reflecting changes in policy. This SPD serves two primary purposes:
1. to guide preparation and consideration of planning applications to enhance the quality of new development within Huntingdonshire; and
 2. to provide a methodology for neighbourhood planning groups to produce their own landscape and townscape assessments to support policies within neighbourhood plans.
- 3.2 The revised SPD will support the implementation of the policies within the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 by:
- providing information on the existing landscape character of the district
 - providing information on the existing townscape character of the spatial planning areas and key service centre settlements
 - helping developers in their submission of planning applications by providing guidance on landscape and townscape issues to be considered as part of any development proposal to guide the location and integration of new development within the existing landscape and townscape
 - encouraging comprehensive consideration of landscape and townscape issues and their interrelationship with development
 - informing neighbourhood plan preparation
- 3.3 The application of the guidance in the revised SPD aims to contribute to a variety of benefits:
- the conservation and enhancement of the landscape's distinctive qualities
 - promotion of a sense of place and local distinctiveness
 - minimisation of the impact of new development on the surrounding area through successful integration
 - enhancement of the sustainability of new development
 - promotion of opportunities for enhancement, creation or linking of habitats
 - provision of the strategic context for preparation of more detailed local assessments of landscape and townscape character in support of neighbourhood plans

Key areas of change between the current and revised SPD

- 3.4 The current Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD identifies nine landscape character areas: The Fens, Fen Margin, Central Claylands, Ouse Valley, Grafham Water, South East Claylands, Nene Valley, Southern Wolds and Northern Wolds. These areas and their boundaries have been unchanged in the revised SPD, instead updates to the guidance within each of their assessments have been made to incorporate key changes to these landscapes such as solar farms and transport

infrastructure. Text relating to Green Infrastructure Priority Areas and green infrastructure projects such as the Great Fen have been added so that the revised SPD can assist in the implementation of Local Plan policies and current landscape projects and initiatives.

- 3.5 The current SPD includes townscape assessments for Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives, Ramsey and Godmanchester. Each assessment identified a series of character areas differentiating the key areas of development based on their physical forms, design, age, historical and cultural significance and land uses. These assessments were weighted towards the historical elements of the townscape with limited assessment on development post the 1950s.
- 3.6 The revised SPD has updated the assessments for Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives, Ramsey and Godmanchester and also carried out assessments for Brampton, Little Paxton, Buckden, Fenstanton, Kimbolton, Sawtry, Somersham, Warboys and Yaxley. This is to reflect the Spatial Planning Areas and Key Service Centres identified within the Development Strategy of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan. This is where development is primarily focused meaning that there is now detailed guidance available for the majority of planning applications submitted to the Council. Each of the assessments in the revised SPD are more detailed on the individual characteristics and identities of each character area identified. A more balanced approach was also taken between historical and modern development. This is particularly important as post 1950s development makes up a considerable amount of Huntingdonshire's built environment and where many Huntingdonshire residents live. Each character area also has a series of bullet points of what development proposals should seek to do in that area to conserve, enhance and reflect local character.
- 3.7 The current SPD made little connection between the relationship between the natural and built environments within these assessments. This has been a major area of revision with such elements considered together as an integral part of design, development and character of an area. Each of the settlements assessed consider the landscape setting and edges and visual prominence that influence the settlement as well as the townscape character. This is important as some settlements are greatly influenced by natural factors such as the Ouse Valley, Country Parks and Local Nature Reserves. This approach will also assist the Council in shaping sustainable development that has greater opportunities to provide a biodiversity net gain, incorporate green and natural spaces for communities and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- 3.8 The current SPD identifies several building types which are used throughout the assessments. In the revised SPD, further building types were added as some were very broad so were split into several more specific types and to reflect modern design for residential, commercial, business and retail development.
- 3.9 The revised SPD provides practical guidance and a methodology for neighbourhood plan groups to empower them to undertake their own landscape and townscape assessments utilising their local knowledge and

produce their own evidence base documents without necessarily relying on consultants at their financial expense. Landscape and the built environment are common areas of interest within neighbourhood plans. The proposed methodology will assist neighbourhood planning groups to retain key characteristics through the preparation of design, landscape, conservation and heritage policies. The guidance and methodology can be found in full in Appendix 2 (the methodology can also be found in the Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document: Consultation Draft 2021).

- 3.10 The Government has reinforced its commitment to neighbourhood planning and view it as an important way to plan for beautiful places that champion neighbourhood design supporting environmental sustainability and enhancing the life of residents. This revised SPD therefore moves the Council further in line with the government's preferred direction.
- 3.11 The revised SPD is also accompanied by an [interactive map](#) which is another step toward the Government's preferred direction of incorporating greater digitalisation into the planning system. Further details and a user guide for this have been provided in Appendix 3. Having this resource means that local residents, agents and planning officers will be able to better navigate and access the information and apply the guidance within the revised SPD much more easily to planning applications and neighbourhood plan preparations. Maps have also been included within the revised SPD for those who may struggle to view the interactive map digitally.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be included in this section prior to its consideration by the Cabinet.

5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 5.1 The key risk in not endorsing the Landscape and Townscape SPD: Consultation Draft 2021 to proceed to public consultation is that dated guidance and resources will continue to be used with limited effect in positively shaping proposals and neighbourhood plans that are locally specific. This will not best conserve and enhance the character of Huntingdonshire's landscape, towns and villages.

6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 This report seeks approval to proceed to public consultation. Subject to the approval from Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) and Cabinet to proceed to public consultation which will be carried out via the planning policy consultation portal and will start shortly after Cabinet. It will last for 8 weeks in recognition of the length of the revised SPD.
- 6.2 Following the close of the consultation, all responses will be reviewed. Where necessary changes will be made to the revised SPD. Regulations

11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 require that before an SPD can be adopted, a consultation statement must be prepared which sets out who were consulted, summaries of the main issues raised and how those issues have been addressed.

- 6.3 Following the production of the consultation statement, an adoption statement will be produced in line with the requirements of the Regulations and all will be taken to the next possible Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) and Cabinet meetings with a recommendation to adopt the revised SPD. As soon as practicable after the decision of Cabinet, the SPD and adoption statement will be published on the Council's website.

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

- 7.1 The revised Landscape and Townscape SPD will assist in the delivery of several objectives related to the Council's work programme and key actions within the Corporate Plan (2018-2022):

- People – Support people to improve their health and well-being
 - Ensuring new developments have sufficient public green open spaces including play provision
 - Prioritising accessible, high quality, well maintained open space, walking and cycling facilities on new housing developments
 - Meeting the housing and support needs of our population
- People – Develop stronger and more resilient communities to enable people to help themselves
 - Support community planning including working with parishes to complete Neighbourhood Plans
- Place – Accelerate business growth and investment
 - Supporting new and growing businesses and promoting business success
 - Supporting economic growth in market towns and rural areas
- Place – Improve the supply of new and affordable housing, jobs and community facilities to meet current and future need
 - Planning and delivering the provision of decent market and affordable housing for current and future needs
 - Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet objectively assessed needs
 - Ensuring there are the right community and leisure facilities to support new housing developments

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 If approved by Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) and Cabinet to proceed to public consultation, the requirements set out in Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)

(England) Regulations 2012 for Supplementary Planning Documents will be adhered to.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Planning Officers at Huntingdonshire District Council have undertaken and implemented the review of the Landscape and Townscape SPD. The GIS and Spatial Team within 3C Shared Services have also been involved in transferring data into web-based GIS databases to enable it to be viewed by the public as an interactive map.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 10.1 An updated and revised Landscape and Townscape SPD and accompanying interactive map will aid decision making and the implementation of policies within the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. This guidance is required to support the wildlife, habitat, cultural and historical values of defined character areas and particular environments so that developments respond positively to their landscape and townscape context. It will also support neighbourhood plan groups who can use the guidance to write assessments for their local area. These contribute towards moving the Council further in the preferred direction of the Government by taking an increasing emphasis on locally specific design and the digitalisation of planning data.
- 10.2 It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet endorse the Landscape and Townscape SPD: Consultation Draft 2021 attached as Appendix 1 for public consultation.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- Appendix 1 – Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document: Consultation Draft 2021
Appendix 2 - Methodology for local communities to assess landscape and townscape character
Appendix 3 – Interactive map user guidance

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD \(2007\)](#)

[Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 \(2019\)](#)

[Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)

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