

## **Executive Portfolio Statement:** **Huntingdonshire - Our Sustainable Environment**

In my portfolio of Operations and Environment I would like to set out this Council's and my own commitment to an environmentally and financially sustainable Huntingdonshire.

We **Love Huntingdonshire**. This Council has a longstanding record and commitment to the environment, enabling Huntingdonshire to be a good place to live and work, with a good start in life and a place to enjoy good health. We have shown this through action.

**Pride of Place** was established within our 2018 manifesto with continuous development of good quality services, improving them to be more sustainable with good financial management. Our aim is not just to be successful, but to be both environmentally and financially sustainable.

**Nature and Biodiversity.** Huntingdonshire District Council is the guardian of 1,534 hectares of green space, owning and managing 42.8 hectares of woodlands with a managed tree canopy of 400 hectares including over 9000 individual trees.

Let me set out what we have achieved so far in our Built and Natural Environment as well as our own operations, our immediate plans already agreed and those I have asked to be developed. I call on the Council to support Love Huntingdonshire and our commitment to doubling nature.

### **What have we already delivered?**

#### **Our Own Activities**

We have adapted our own activities as a Council so that we can continue to provide our services in an efficient manner while still being sustainable financially and environmentally.

Since 2018 CO<sub>2</sub> savings have increased to over 600 tons per annum through innovative investment in our buildings, with a further 440 tonnes per annum projected to be saved by March 2022 thanks to our planned decarbonisation project. This project

sees HDC securing £3.8M Salix funding to reduce our carbon emissions at Pathfinder House and One Leisure Ramsey.

We have introduced our first electric van and implemented fleet reduction plans as well as new monitoring equipment to reduce energy use at our buildings, while working to establish a carbon baseline management plan and looking to identify how we can move the last 20% of our energy to renewable sources.

The introduction of Council Anywhere has enabled the council to actively encourage members of staff to work flexibly, resulting in considerably reduced business travel, with the added benefits of improved efficiency and staff wellbeing.

We are piloting a community business pledge and award scheme to help recognise and celebrate the environmental focus of our businesses.

We are working with Highways England to keep our main roads clean and green and enhancing our Council wide approach to Enforcement with a strategy and shared delivery plan, across all Council services, including how we can better use enforcement to tackle environmental crime.

Our waste services are in the top quartile in the Country, with recycling contamination below 7% - which is achieved through education, communication and direct intervention with residents when required

We have funded projects to help prevent litter and increase recycling, including working alongside our Town Councils by implementing high street recycling litter bins.

## Our Natural Environment

We are all so fortunate to live in Huntingdonshire and be in such close proximity to beautiful parks, open and green spaces.

The last year has raised awareness for all about the importance of protecting these open spaces, with **95% of our residents having visited a park or open space**, and **64% say they are essential to their quality of life**. Supporting them to preserve and increase nature for our residents to enjoy is crucial.

Which is why we supported and adopted a Healthy Open Spaces Strategy that aims to get more people in our parks and open spaces, to help improve their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as creating communities within our valuable parks.

With great feedback from our residents, we have successfully planted more **pictorial meadows, the equivalent footprint of 5 and a half Wembley stadiums**, to help double nature and increase biodiversity in our open spaces. The pictorial meadows are not only a huge benefit for the wildlife, but officers have been inundated with gratitude and photos of the flowers from residents across the district.

Berman Park has been a successful addition to St Ives, a brand new natural park for residents to enjoy and for wildlife and biodiversity to thrive.

We are working towards project delivery of £2.5million investment in our open spaces and country parks over the next 3 years, including Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Paxton Pits Nature Reserve.

Three of our parks and open spaces have been awarded a Green Flag and Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and Priory Park host a further award for protecting bee habitats.

Our Tree Strategy, adopted in 2020, will increase the tree canopy in Huntingdon planting over 3000 more trees and protecting those that we have. We have started

already with initiatives such as the recent planting of 100 saplings with the Young Farmers and the Woodland Trust planted near Hartford.

### Our Built Environment

We are also working hard to help shape our built environment for good, through planning policy, guidance, and interventions.

We want to at least double the provision for electrical charging points in our market towns and install secure cycle hubs to encourage more cycling between our car parks, parks and open spaces and leisure facilities to develop better infrastructure to encourage cycling.

Adopted May 2019, Huntingdonshire's Local Plan identifies several Green Infrastructure Priority Areas, the policy also sets out HDC's approach to protecting and enhancing Huntingdonshire's green infrastructure for the benefit of biodiversity and residents for recreation and leisure

Green infrastructure serves to balance built development - it facilitates opportunities for people to access open space and provides habitats for wildlife. Improving the ecological, visual, heritage and recreational value of the countryside while bringing environmental, social and health benefits.

Proposals for facilities associated with strategic green infrastructure that, by their nature, need to be in the countryside, will be supported subject to their compatibility with the green infrastructure where adverse effects are avoided

The new **Local Plan to 2036** includes **8 key policies** to shape Huntingdonshire's environment:

- LP2 – Strategy for Development - **minimises travel to access employment and leisure** opportunities, **promotes cycling and walking**
- LP3 - **protect and enhance green infrastructure for biodiversity** with increased green space trees to store carbon and reduce flooding impact
- LP5 – Flood risk – **minimise contribution to further flooding**, protect our vital floodplains
- LP12 – **Design for energy efficiency** to reduce energy demands, challenging but achievable zero carbon target.
- LP16 – sustainable travel, **increased opportunities for walking and cycling**
- LP30 – **Biodiversity, priority habitats**

- LP35 – **Renewable and low carbon energy**, supporting energy generation reducing fossil fuel use
- LP36 – **Air quality**, attention to impact of new developments including promotion of clean air zones

### **Future Plans**

To establish a clear Climate Strategy in 2022 with a Climate Action Plan adopted and underway by 2023, drawing all our activity together to measure and monitor our impact on CO2 and nature to ensure we continue to deliver positive change.

To identify what we can do more of through:

- better use our statutory powers to shape our built environment
- better use our enforcement powers to shape our built and natural environment
- implementing our Healthy Open Spaces Strategy
- managing our valued green open spaces and parks to positively impact nature and wildlife

### **Summary**

We have set out and followed an **environmentally sensitive manifesto that is financially sustainable**. The challenge facing all of us is significant and the pace of change is faster. We are committed to doing more.

Our single Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan will be established in 2022 and then reviewed on an annual basis to ensure continued progress.