

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document

Meeting/Date: Cabinet – 17th March 2022

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) attached as Appendix 1 is an update and expansion of the Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD adopted in 2007. The revised SPD will support the delivery of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan 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.

The draft SPD was consulted on between 15 October and 10 December 2021, a total of 141 comments were received from 18 consultees. A Consultation Statement attached as Appendix 2 summarises these responses and the amendments made to the SPD.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is

RECOMMENDED

- To adopt the proposed Landscape and Townscape as a Supplementary Planning Document and by doing so supersede the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2007); and
- In making that decision, note the comments from the Consultation Statement, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Reports and Equality Impact Assessment.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's approval for the Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which was subject to an eight week public consultation between 15 October and 10 December 2021.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The current Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD was adopted in 2007. Since its adoption, there have been changes in national and local policy. Furthermore, the landscape and townscape features of areas have altered since 2007 through residential, employment and mixed-use developments, renewable energy proposals and major transport infrastructure projects. These factors justified a comprehensive review and update to the guidance provided within the Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2007).

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 To support neighbourhood planning and local communities, the revised SPD includes a methodology for local communities to assess landscape and townscape character.
- 3.3 The revised SPD is accompanied by an [interactive map](#). 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 SPD.
- 3.4 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

3.5 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

4. MAIN ISSUES RAISED DURING CONSULTATION

4.1 The draft SPD was published for an eight week public consultation between 15 October and 10 December 2021 following approval to do so from Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) and Cabinet on 6 October and 14 October respectively. During this period a total of 141 comments were received from 18 consultees. A summary of the main issues raised in comments as well as the consultees that made comments are presented in the Consultation Statement, attached to this report as Appendix 2. The complete comments received also can be found on the Council's [Consultation Portal](#).

4.2 Following consultation, a number of significant amendments were made as well as numerous minor changes:

- Further assessment questions to aid local character assessments.
- Amended references to 'Ouse Valley' to include its full name 'Great Ouse Valley' for geographic accuracy.
- Additional information regarding the importance and characteristics of the Great Ouse Valley.
- Changes to development proposals relating to heritage assets to ensure consistency with national policy and guidance.
- Additional information and/or minor corrections to the townscape character assessments for Buckden, Godmanchester, Sawtry and Yaxley.
- Added a map depicting the Green Infrastructure Priority Areas and Green Infrastructure projects.
- Amendments to and additions of definitions into the glossary.
- Spelling and grammatical corrections.

5. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT & HABITATS REGULATION ASSESSMENT

5.1 Supplementary planning documents may in exceptional circumstances require a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) if they are likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already been assessed during the preparation of the Local Plan.

5.2 The Habitats Directive requires competent authorities to decide whether or not a plan or project can proceed having undertaken the following “appropriate assessment requirements” to:

- Determine whether a plan or project may have a significant effect on a European site
- If required, undertake an appropriate assessment of the plan or project
- Decide whether there may be an adverse effect on the integrity of the European site in light of the appropriate assessment

5.3 In order to determine whether a SEA and an appropriate assessment were necessary for the Landscape and Townscape SPD a screening report was prepared and is attached as Appendix 3. The report was shared with the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for their views. The bodies agreed with the conclusions of the report that a full SEA and HRA were not necessary.

5.4 The Landscape and Townscape SPD Is a guidance document that aims to integrate new development sensitively into their surrounding context by considering landscape and townscape character. It does not present any policies or proposals in its own right and serves only to provide greater clarity about the expectations in relation to existing policies within the adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036. The Local Plan has been subject to both Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment) and Habitats Regulations Assessment.

5.5 On this basis, it is considered that the SPD will not have a significant effect on the environment and there will be no significant adverse effects on the integrity of European sites as a result of the Landscape and Townscape SPD.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment of the SPD, which is attached as Appendix 4 has been completed. The assessment shows that the SPD will have a neutral and/ or positive impact on equality and diversity.

7. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

7.1 The Panel discussed the Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document at its meeting on 2nd March 2022.

- 7.2 Councillor Chapman expressed his disappointment in the lack of community engagement with the consultation as the document will impact on future planning applications. However, the Chairman observed that the document was very thorough and well written and the lack of response may have been due to having no objections. Councillor Roberts also praised the report and commented especially on the interactive map, although again expressed that the lack of community engagement was disappointing. The Panel heard that all towns and parishes had been contacted for comment as part of the consultation process.
- 7.3 In response to a further comment from Councillor Roberts, it was confirmed to the Panel that towns and parishes could now use this document as the basis to create a neighbourhood plan.
- 7.4 Councillor Butler expressed his disappointment over the Great Fen Project. It was stated that valuable farmland had been used for this project which, it was claimed, did not engage with local communities or manage it's land. The point was noted.
- 7.5 The Panel welcomed the report and encourage the Cabinet to endorse the recommendations within the report.

8. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 8.1 The key risk in not adopting the Landscape and Townscape SPD 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.

9. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 This report seeks that the Landscape and Townscape be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. Subject to the approval from Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) and Cabinet to adopt the SPD, an adoption statement will be published following Cabinet's decision on the Council's website.

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

- 10.1 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

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 If adopted by Cabinet, the SPD will supersede the previous adopted guidance within the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2007) and will be a material consideration within the determination of planning applications.

12. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 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.

13. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 13.1 A 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, aesthetic 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.
- 13.2 It is recommended that Cabinet adopt the Landscape and Townscape SPD attached as Appendix 1 and by doing so supersede the Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD (2007).

14. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

- Appendix 1 – Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document
- Appendix 2 – Consultation Statement
- Appendix 3 – Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment
- Appendix 4 – Equality Impact Assessment

15. 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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