

**Public**  
**Key Decision – Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Huntingdonshire Place Strategy Update

**Meeting/Date:** Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) –  
4 January 2023  
Cabinet – 24 January 2023

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor S Conboy, Executive Leader, Chair of  
the Cabinet and Executive Councillor for Place

**Report by:** Corporate Director (Place)

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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### **Executive Summary:**

This report provides an update on the development of a new, co-developed Place Strategy for Huntingdonshire, known as Huntingdonshire Futures.

The Place Strategy will be a statement of shared aspirations for the future of Huntingdonshire that seeks to improve the lives of all our residents, communities and businesses. It will guide future strategy and policy developments and investment decisions by the Council and partners, to enable more effective delivery of integrated interventions that better serve the current and future needs of residents, communities and businesses.

This update provides an overview of engagement activity undertaken to date and scheduled for early 2023. It also provides a summary of high-level feedback received and introduces the emerging Place Strategy structure and areas of focus.

Cabinet are asked to note the work completed to date, comment on the emerging Place Strategy and note the intention for the draft Place Strategy to come back to Cabinet in March 2023.

### **Recommendation(s):**

Cabinet is asked to:

- Note the extensive engagement and work with partners and stakeholders to date.
- Provide comment on the emerging Place Strategy structure and areas of focus.
- Note that the draft Place Strategy will be presented to Cabinet in March 2023.

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide an update on the development of a new Place Strategy for Huntingdonshire.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Huntingdonshire is already one of the best places to live in the country, but we want to make sure this is true for future generations too with a greener, fairer future for all. That is why we are developing a shared Place Strategy, known as Huntingdonshire Futures, that will shape not only the future of Huntingdonshire but our future activities.
- 2.2 The Council has facilitated the development of Huntingdonshire Futures. It is a priority area of work for the Council given our unique and extensive range of responsibilities and desire to deliver the best outcomes for our geographical area and residents.
- 2.3 Given the scope of Huntingdonshire Futures it has explicitly and deliberately been developed with others, using a variety of bespoke engagement techniques and building on existing mechanisms where possible. The development of Huntingdonshire Futures has been based on existing data, intelligence, insight and existing strategies. However, a fresh approach has been adopted so that it challenged current thinking and considered future societal, lifestyle and technological advancements and changes.

The **aims** and **benefits** of developing Huntingdonshire Futures are:

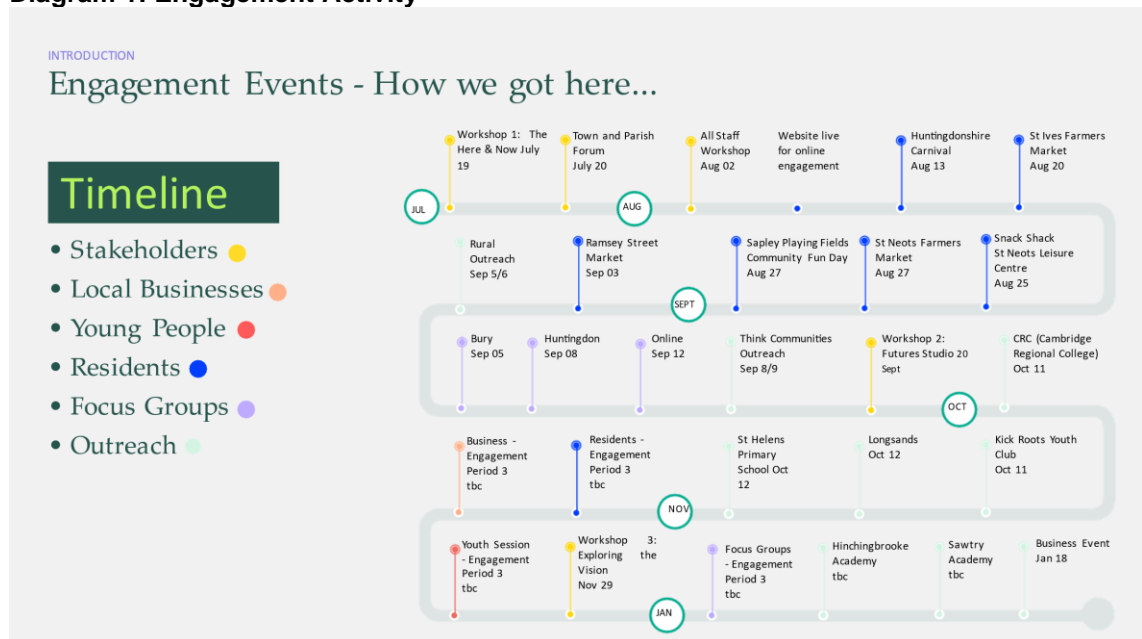
- To create a statement of shared aspirations for the future of our place, people, economy and the environment, which improves the lives of all our residents, communities and businesses
- To unite stakeholders through a shared sense of direction
- Reduce duplication of effort and funding across the Council and partners by addressing shared issues and priorities in an integrated and holistic way thus encouraging more effective decision making and use of limited public funds
- To guide future strategy and policy developments and investment decisions by the Council and partners enabling more effective delivery of integrated interventions that better serve the current and future needs of residents, communities and businesses.

## 3. WORKING TOGETHER TO DEVELOP HUNTINGDONSHIRE FUTURES

- 3.1 Huntingdonshire Futures is being developed in collaboration with others. We have deliberately sought to bring together residents, businesses, partners, utilities providers and public sector bodies to set out their views about the future. Huntingdonshire Futures has been co-created to determine what is important and right for Huntingdonshire and to be a strategy that paints the type of place we all want Huntingdonshire to be.

- 3.2 To-date a broad approach has been used, utilising a range of tools and techniques in order to develop a clear understanding of the current perceptions, strengths and challenges we face as an area as well as identifying where there was consensus and dissonance on different aspects of Huntingdonshire. This has included three half day stakeholder workshops with representatives from nearly 70 organisations and engaging existing partnerships and forums such as the Huntingdonshire Place Board and Parish Forum. Outside of the stakeholder workshops regular updates on activities and progress have been widely shared.
- 3.3 Between July and the end of September 2022 489 resident conversations have taken place, with residents able to visit one of four pop up exhibitions in locations such as Huntingdon Carnival and Ramsey Market, attending virtual or physical focus groups, engaging through existing community groups such as Sapley Park Fun Day and conversations in rural community meeting places such as benches in country parks.
- 3.4 During October 2022 there was a particular focus on engaging young people. This engagement was undertaken alongside the Huntingdonshire Climate Strategy engagement work. 147 children and young people participated in 'what if' engagement exercises through a programme with schools and groups including Kick Root Youth Club, Cambridge Regional College, Longsands Academy and St Helen's School.
- 3.5 Throughout the entire engagement process, thoughts, ideas and feedback have been gathered online at [Huntingdonshire Futures](#). Social Media and promotion through partners such as Town & Parish Councils, the voluntary and community sector has been used to promote opportunities for residents to find a pop-up exhibition, sign up to a focus group or find out what is online.
- 3.6 Diagram 1 summarises the engagement activities undertaken so far. A small number of focus groups and business focussed events were cancelled following the death of Her Majesty the Queen.
- 3.7 Across December 2022 and January 2023, the focus is on testing and refining the focus of the strategy, with the emerging areas of focus being shared with key partners and stakeholders. There will be a business focussed event, a further Huntingdonshire District Council All Member session, resident focus groups and sessions with young people in local schools. Residents will also be encouraged to review the emerging themes and leave comments at [Huntingdonshire Futures](#).

**Diagram 1: Engagement Activity**



#### 4. WHAT WE HAVE HEARD

4.1 Through our recent engagement exercise, getting the right balance between growing a vibrant local economy, protecting the environment and ensuring the core features that people want from the place they live is key. Below provides a summary of what we have heard.

#### 4.2 Key messages – People

- Make the District one of the top 10 places to live in the UK focus on quality of life
- Make decision making and funding equitable and inclusive, driven by the people it is meant to serve
- Maximise participation in volunteering and support existing organisations and initiatives
- Connect children and young people with local opportunities
- Help people to get fit and keep fit
- Encourage more face-to-face time with local services

#### 4.3 Key messages – Place & Communities

- Enhance the role of the river within towns for recreation and green tourism
- Create communities not just new homes. New development should be balanced to avoid overwhelming local character and infrastructure
- Transition away from reliance on the car by making the district a place where public transport and active travel is the most desirable option
- Encourage shared community responsibility for the upkeep of green and open spaces to foster a sense of ownership and social interaction
- Create a district wide strategy for buses with more and later running routes, including rural areas

#### 4.4 **Key messages – Economy**

- Revitalise and diversify town centres including fostering cafe culture and the night-time economy (pubs and entertainment)
- Expand employment and training opportunities through lifelong learning and networks
- Attract higher value jobs by celebrating accessibility combined with remote working opportunities
- Educate businesses on sustainable practices
- Don't leave rural areas behind - investment shouldn't just be focused on market towns
- Keep investment local

#### 4.5 **Key messages – Environment**

- Roll out a comprehensive building stock retrofit programme
- Make the District a place where the threat of flooding is reduced as much as possible
- Encourage rewilding and biodiversity in both public and private spaces including more trees within towns
- Establish farmers as sustainable guardians of land
- Pioneer the transition to the Circular Economy
- Accelerate the transition to electric vehicles and provide e-bikes and e-scooters in towns
- Create better pedestrian and cycle footpaths

4.6 Whilst Huntingdonshire Futures is in development the feedback has been used to inform the Council's Climate Strategy which is also being presented to Cabinet on the 24 January 2023. Feedback from the climate specific focus groups has also been fed into Huntingdonshire Futures. This deliberate planning of activity has ensured we have maximised engagement with residents and used funding efficiently. Feedback from Huntingdonshire Futures is also being used to inform the development of the Council's 2023/24 Corporate Plan.

4.7 Feedback will also be used to inform the initial phase of public engagement on an updated Local Plan, pending agreement by the Cabinet on the 24 January 2023 to commence a full update to the adopted Local Plan.

### 5. **EMERGING PLACE STRATEGY**

5.1 It is proposed to have one **Destination Statement** that sets out what we collectively seek to achieve, with the Huntingdonshire Place Strategy providing the route map towards our destination: **a brighter future for Huntingdonshire.**

5.2 **Five Journeys** underpin the Destination Statement. These express the desired outcomes and reflect what has emerged through discussions to date. These focus areas, listed below will enable stakeholders to work towards common outcomes.

1. Pride in Place
2. Environment Innovation
3. Equitable Economy

- 4. Health Embedded
- 5. Travel Transformed

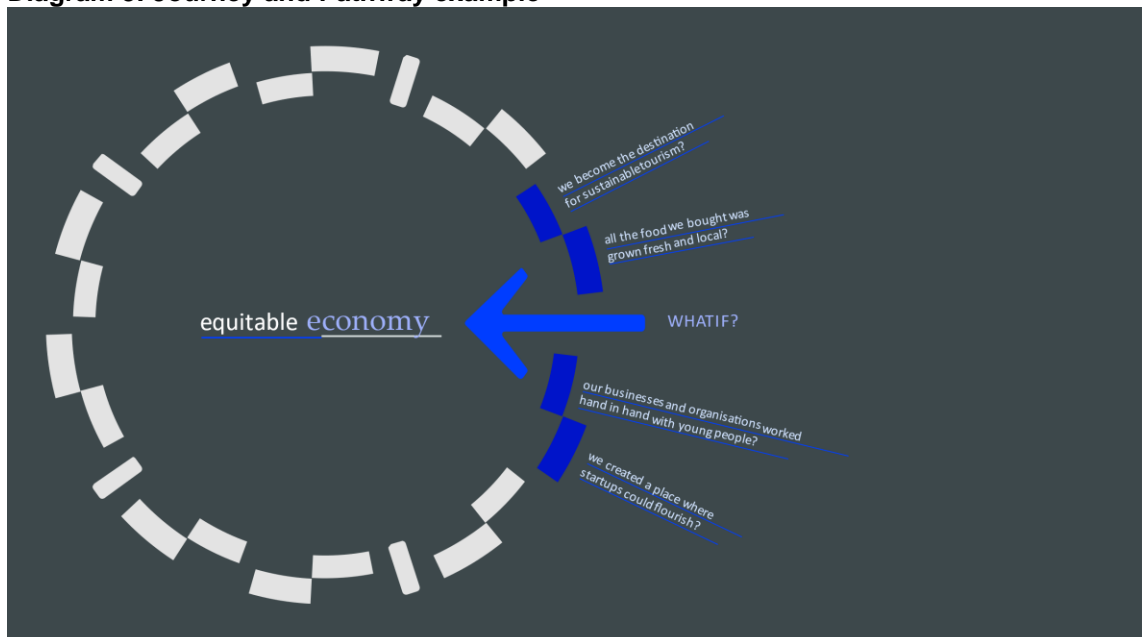
5.3 Each Journey is supported by a number of ambitions, known as **Pathways**. These Pathways articulate how we want to get to a desired outcome. There are currently twenty Pathways. How they all fit together is shown in Diagram 2.

**Diagram 2: Place Strategy Route map**



5.4 An example of one of the Journeys and associated Pathways is shown below. The emerging strategy structure and areas of focus can be found at Appendix 1.

**Diagram 3: Journey and Pathway example**



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

- 6.1 The Panel discussed the Place Strategy Update Report at its meeting on 4th January 2023. It should be noted that all Council members were invited to a workshop on the 27 September 2022 to share their views. Members are invited to a further session on the 31 January 2023 to further refine the strategy.
- 6.2 Councillor Pickering observed that the headline 'What if the car was a relic of the past' suggested an unthinkable future for many residents. The Panel were assured that this was a discussion point as it was appreciated that this is not practical or feasible in parts of the district. It was further highlighted that discussion continued on how to reduce length of car journeys and how that could link with more sustainable transport. The Panel also heard that this point would be looked at to adapt to a more positive messaging approach whilst still conveying the same topic.
- 6.3 Councillor Grey enquired about continuity plans for the project due to the resignation of the lead officer. The Panel were advised that planning had been undertaken to ensure continuation of work during the recruitment process.
- 6.4 Councillor Grey further expressed that whilst remaining optimistic, there were some reservations about what could realistically be achieved and whether or not the views of local residents had been reflected in the identified pathways. The Panel were assured that the priorities within the report had been established following engagement with residents and communities.
- 6.5 In addition to this, Councillor Grey questioned whether Huntingdonshire would be a leader in some of the aspirations highlighted within the report. The Panel were advised that whilst the Council may not be a leader in these areas, it would be a facilitator in making them happen and setting a good example for residents to follow. Furthermore the Panel heard that through community engagement and working with partners to ensure communication between interested groups, a positive, proactive and supportive district community would be encouraged.
- 6.6 Following the discussion, the Panel were in agreement that the Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations within the report.

## **7. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 7.1 The biggest risk is maintaining momentum after the intensive period of strategy development and engagement concludes. Mitigations include proactive activities within workshops, forums and conversations with partners focussing on pilots and action to test new ways of working.

## **8. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 8.1 Cabinet is asked to consider the recommendation to endorse the work to date and to provide comment on the emerging Place Strategy structure.
- 8.2 The immediate next step is to conclude activities and dialogue to further test and refine the focus of the strategy through the planned engagement activities outlined in paragraph 3.7.
- 8.3 The Place Strategy will be used to inform the development of the Council's future policies and plans including the Corporate Plan and issues explored in the Local Plan.
- 8.4 The intention is for the draft Place Strategy to be brought to Cabinet and full Council for adoption in March 2023.

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

- 9.1 The delivery of the Place Strategy is a key action within the Council's 2022/23 Corporate Plan. The draft strategy will directly deliver against the Council's current objectives of:
- Tackling Climate Change and caring for the environment
  - Enhancing employment opportunities and supporting businesses
  - Improving Housing Provision
  - Supporting needs of residents
  - Strengthening our communities
- 9.2 The 2022/23 Corporate Plan is a transitional, interim plan. Feedback from Huntingdonshire Futures is informing the development of the Council's new three-year Corporate Plan, which starts in 2023/24.

## **10. CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 Please refer to section 3 on engagement and consultation activity completed and scheduled.

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

## **12. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no direct financial or resource implications as a result of this report.



### **13. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 As set out in the Community (Transition) Strategy 2021-23, the Council are committed to supporting residents through a positive and ongoing working relationship with local communities. Tackling health improvements has featured strongly in the Place Strategy conversation, resulting in one of the five Journeys focussing on **Health Embedded**. Pathways for action include it being easier to live healthily, nobody being lonely and people of every age having the opportunity to skill up. Support in these areas will directly contribute to positive health outcomes.

### **14. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 In December 2021 the Council adopted a core set of environmental principles, the Council are now committed to the development of a new Huntingdonshire Climate Strategy. In October 2022 the Council passed a Cost of Living and Climate Change motion that recognises that the current cost of living and climate crises require joint attention to support the wellbeing of residents and businesses. In passing this motion, the council committed to not only the delivery of a Climate Strategy but also that in making decisions on investment and delivery we will wherever possible.
- 14.2 Within the draft Place Strategy one of the five Journeys focuses on **Environmental Innovation**, with pathways for action including zero carbon becoming the norm, our natural assets inspiring new infrastructure, all energy being produced within the district and all our children being fluent in sustainability.

### **15. EQUALITIES**

- 15.1 The Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 15.2 Good planning and effective regeneration can improve environments and opportunities for communities experiencing disadvantage. Planning which does not adequately engage with or consider the needs of local communities is unlikely to improve their life chances and may further entrench area-based disadvantage.
- 15.3 The development of the Place Strategy has deliberately sought to engage a broad range of groups and stakeholders as outlined in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7.

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

- 16.1 To provide an update on work to date, feedback received so far and opportunity for Cabinet input into shaping the emerging strategy.

## **17. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Emerging Place Strategy overview slides.

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