

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

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

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

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Planning

**Report by:** Chief Planning Officer

**Ward(s) affected:** All Wards

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### **Executive Summary:**

The preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant market signals.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021 states that Local Plans and spatial development strategies should be informed throughout their preparation by a Sustainability Appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements. This should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains) and the effects they will have on the environment and people's quality of life. Significant adverse impacts on these objectives should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where significant adverse impacts are unavoidable, suitable mitigation measures should be proposed (or, where this is not possible, compensatory measures should be considered).

To be sure that a plan does not cause economic, environmental or social problems, at the heart of the plan production process there is a system of assessment known as Sustainability Appraisal (SA). As part of the preparation of an updated Huntingdonshire Local Plan, a draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report is required. The scoping report is the first stage in plan production.

SA is a systematic process for assessing the extent to which an emerging plan will help to achieve sustainable development. It is an opportunity to consider ways by which the replacement Local Plan can contribute to improvements in economic, environmental and social conditions, as well as a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that the Local Plan might otherwise have.

A thorough understanding of the context of existing plans and policies and of the current baseline situation is needed in order to be able to predict the effects the plan may have, and to identify key issues that will need to be addressed. These inform a framework with a series of SA objectives. This framework provides a means by which the performance of the plan and alternatives can be assessed against environmental, economic and social factors.

In accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the draft scoping report was shared with the statutory bodies of the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022 with responses received by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Amendments made in response to these are being integrated into the Scoping Report and will be summarised in an appendix as required.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet is

**RECOMMENDED**

- To approve the contents of the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report; and
- To agree that the draft Scoping Report can be published for public consultation commencing in February 2023 and running for six weeks

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

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose, legal context and content of the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and asks that Cabinet approve its contents and agree that it be published for public consultation commencing in February 2023 and running for six weeks.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY?**

- 2.1 There are legal requirements for new planning documents which require an assessment of the plan's impact on the environment to be undertaken. This process is known as Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and is required under the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 2.2 Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) also requires a local planning authority to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of each of the proposals in a Local Plan during its preparation. In addition to environmental aspects this requires consideration of the social and economic aspects of sustainability. More generally, section 39 of the Act requires that the authority preparing a Local Plan must do so 'with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development'. To avoid duplication, it is customary for the SEA and SA to be combined into a single document.
- 2.3 Also, paragraph 7 of the NPPF states that 'the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.' SA is a means by which to assess the emerging plan's sustainability against alternatives.

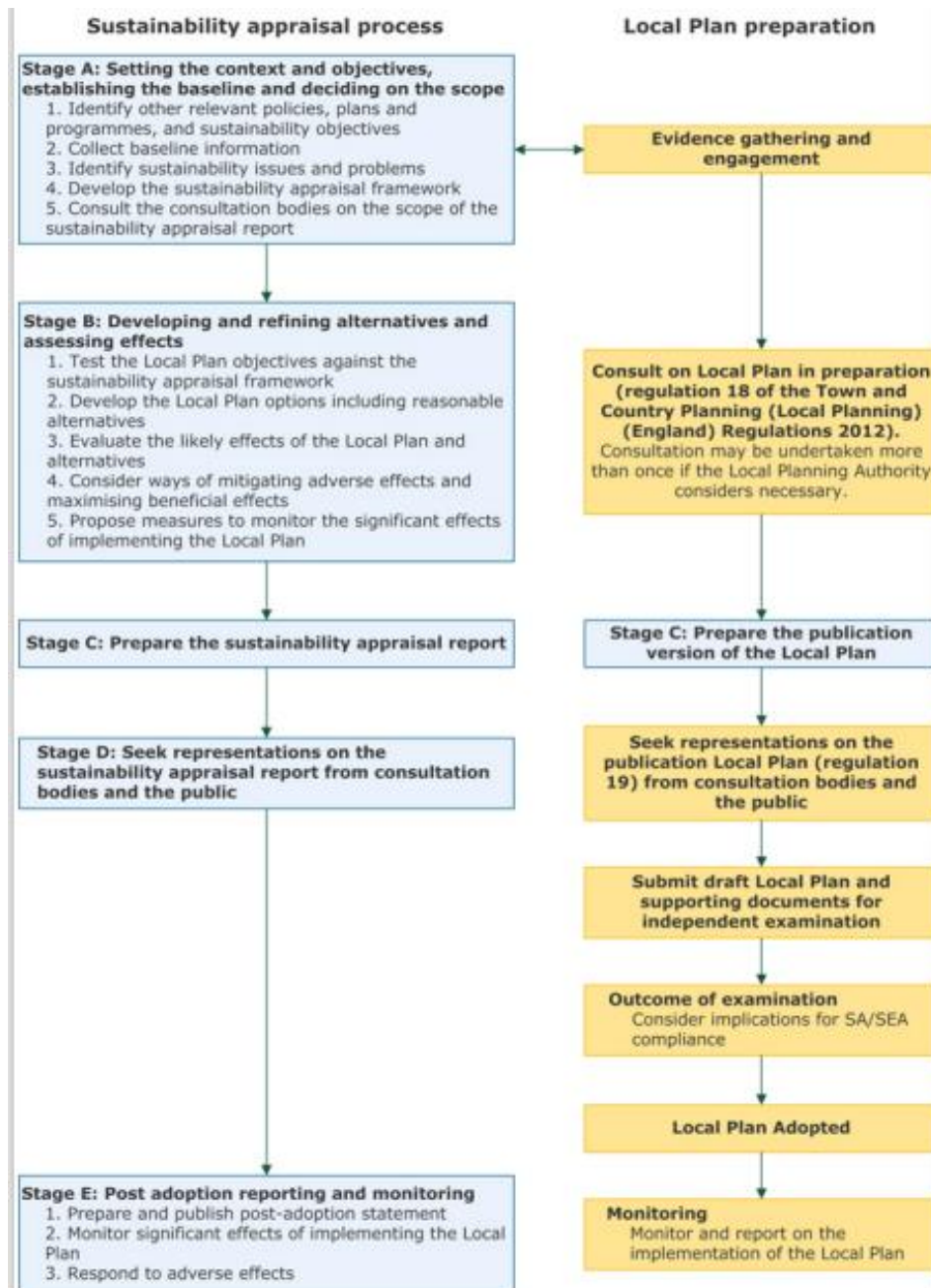
## **3. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL (SA) SCOPING PROCESS**

- 3.1 SA is a systematic process for assessing the extent to which an emerging plan such as a Local Plan will help to achieve sustainable development. It is an opportunity to consider ways by which the plan can contribute to improvements in economic, environmental and social conditions, as well as a means of identifying and mitigating any potential adverse effects that the plan might otherwise have.
- 3.2 Each stage of preparation of the Sustainability Appraisal, including the Scoping Report presented here, is required to include a non-technical summary of the information within the main report to provide a clear, accessible overview of the process and findings. This can be found immediately following the contents page.
- 3.3 The SA process comprises five stages (A-E), each of which stages are undertaken in tandem with the development of a local plan:

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>A</b> Setting the context and objectives,	Known as the 'Scoping stage' the purpose of this stage is to establish the context for sustainability appraisal by assembling the evidence needed to

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>
establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope	inform the appraisal and to establish the framework, by setting up sustainability objectives and decision aiding questions, for undertaking the appraisal (Stage B).
<b>B</b> Develop options and appraise effects	The purpose of this stage is to appraise the plan objectives, options and preferred options/policies, to propose measures for alleviating adverse effects and maximising benefits and to propose indicators for monitoring the plan's sustainability.
<b>C</b> Prepare the SA Report	The purpose of this stage is to present the findings from Stage B in a form suitable for public consultation and use by decision makers.
<b>D</b> Consultation and developing the plan	The purpose of this stage is to consult on the report, to appraise significant changes to the plan objectives, options and preferred options/policies appraised in Stage B and to explain how the SA process has shaped the plan.
<b>E</b> Monitoring and implementation of the plan	The purpose of this stage is to establish ways of considering whether or not to review the plan and to enable sustainability appraisal processes for future plans.

3.4 The National Planning Practice Guidance provides further detail on the SA process and a flowchart of how the SA and local plan production stages interrelate. This is presented below.



3.5 The first stage of producing the local plan is the scoping stage. It consists of the following tasks:

- A1: Identify relevant plans and programmes
- A2: Collect baseline information
- A3: Identify sustainability issues and problems
- A4: Develop the sustainability framework
- A5: Consult on the scope of the sustainability appraisal

3.6 This stage is necessary to propose and agree the way that the plan is to be drawn up including the methodology for the SA process and to collect together information to help shape the next Huntingdonshire Local Plan. A thorough understanding of the context of existing plans and policies and of the current baseline situation is needed in order to be able to predict the

effects the plan may have, and to identify key issues that will need to be addressed.

- 3.7 Within the attached draft Scoping Report chapter 3 and appendix 1 set out the findings of task A1. Chapter 4 explores the current baseline for Huntingdonshire (task A2) focusing on topics grouped into the climate emergency, environmental characteristics and socio-economic characteristics as well as identifying what may happen to the current baseline if there was no new Local Plan. Then chapter 5 summarises the sustainability issues and problems that have been identified for each topic (task A3) and how these may be reflected in the SA framework.
- 3.8 Using the findings of tasks A1, A2 and A3, a proposed sustainability framework was devised (task A4) set out in Table 20 of the draft Scoping Report. The proposed SA framework comprises of 16 SA objectives relating to the climate emergency, environment and socio-economic factors. Each objective is supported by decision aiding questions which will be used to appraise options for the strategy and its alternatives, site allocations and development management policies of the next Local Plan. Alongside the framework, a scoring system/matrix set out on pages 125 to 130 of the draft SA Scoping Report has been devised to assess how each option performs against the appropriate decision aiding questions.

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

- 4.1 The Panel discussed the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report at its meeting on 4th January 2023.
- 4.2 Councillor Gardener observed that clearer labelling to the maps would be helpful specifically mentioning labelling of village halls and flood zones. The Panel heard that the level of detail would be incorporated as much as possible given the scales involved with further detail being added online. Furthermore it was advised that a suite of water management studies would be undertaken and would assist future planning decisions within the district. The Panel were also advised that a link could be added to the document to the current Strategic Flood Risk Assessment on the Council's website to provide access to more detailed mapping.
- 4.3 Following an enquiry from Councillor Harvey on the size of dwellings coming through for development, the Panel were advised that whilst there was no decision on this year, the available information highlights growth in the older population of the district, therefore demand in smaller properties is anticipated in the future.
- 4.4 Councillor Grey sought assurance that best practice was being taken from colleagues in neighbouring authorities. The Panel were assured that this was underway despite the developing stage of progress so far.
- 4.5 Following a further question from Councillor Grey, the Panel heard that the Local Plan would work alongside emerging strategies such as the Climate and Place Strategies. Collaborative work would be undertaken as the

project progressed to ensure assimilation and cohesion between Strategies.

- 4.6 The Panel were also assured that annual reporting would be undertaken to report on progress to date. Following the discussion, the Panel were in agreement that the Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations within the report.

## **5. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

- 5.1 It is proposed that public consultation on the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will commence in February 2023 and run for 6 weeks. The Scoping Report will then be amended where necessary following the consultation and finalised and published on the Council's website.

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

- 6.1 The production of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will assist in the delivery of the Council's objectives within the Corporate Plan (2022-2023):

- Tackling climate change and caring for the environment
- Enhancing employment opportunities and supporting businesses
- Supporting the needs of residents
- Improving the housing situation
- Strengthening our communities

- 6.2 Within the objective 'Improving the housing situation', the draft Scoping Report specifically relates to key action 1: 'Commence an update of the Local Plan. This should ensure that local planning policies include a focus on sustainability of new developments, achieving the right mix of housing sizes, types and tenures to meet the needs of residents, the quality of the built environment, creating healthy spaces and communities, public transport and digital connectivity'.

## **7. CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 In accordance with the Regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, the Council is required to consult on the scope of the SA with the three statutory bodies of the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England for a period of 5 weeks.

- 7.2 A draft of the Scoping Report was shared with these bodies on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2022 with responses requested by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Comments received have been used to amend the draft Scoping Report and summarised in an appendix.

- 7.3 Subject to agreement from Cabinet, the Scoping Report will be published for public engagement. This is not a statutory requirement. However, it is considered to be best practise and provides an opportunity for the community to start shaping the replacement Local Plan from its earliest stage. Any comments received from the wider public engagement period will be used to amend the Scoping Report feeding back into tasks A1 to A4. It is anticipated that consultation on the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will commence in February 2023. The Scoping Report will then be amended where necessary, finalised and published on the Council's website.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 requires that new planning documents are assessed for their impact on the environment. The Council is also required under section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) to carry out an SA of each of the proposals in a Local Plan during its preparation. The Scoping Report is a key stage within this process.

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

- 9.1 At the heart of the plan production is the Sustainability Appraisal process. Its role is to promote sustainable development by assessing the extent to which the emerging plan, when judged against reasonable alternatives, will help to achieve relevant environmental, economic and social objectives.
- 9.2 The draft Scoping Report has been structured around the categories of the climate emergency, the environment and socio-economic characteristics to assess plans/programmes, collect baseline information, identify issues and group objectives. The climate emergency has been made into its own category to reflect the increasing focus and importance of climate change issues in plan making ensuring climate objectives are embedded into plan production alongside objectives for the environment, the economy and social benefits.
- 9.3 HDC's emerging Climate Strategy has been identified within the A1 stage of the scoping process when reviewing relevant plans and programmes. It is however recognised that this strategy only focuses on the Council's own climate impact.

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

- 10.1 The scoping stage is the first stage in local plan production. It identifies the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Sustainability Appraisal report which must be produced alongside the local plan. It sets out the context, objectives and approach of the assessment; and identifies relevant environmental, economic and social issues and objectives.



10.2 It is recommended that Overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet approve the contents of the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and agree that it be published for public consultation commencing in February 2023 and running for six weeks.

**11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#)

[Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 \(as amended\)](#)

[National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) 2021](#)

[National Planning Practice Guidance \(NPPG\): Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal](#)

[National Planning Practice Guidance \(NPPG\): Strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal – sustainability appraisal process flowchart](#)

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