

Appendix 1: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

Introduction and Background

Huntingdonshire Futures is being developed in collaboration with others. Throughout the engagement, we have sought to bring together residents, businesses, partners, utilities providers and public sector bodies to set out their views about the future.

At the heart of Huntingdonshire Futures is understanding what is most important to residents, communities and stakeholders within our towns and rural areas and across Huntingdonshire. Therefore, this summary report sets out the stakeholder engagement activity to date and outlines some of the feedback we have heard. There is a separate report that outlines all resident engagement.

Engagement activity 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:

- **Stakeholder workshops**

Three half day stakeholder workshops, which took place on 19 July 2022, 20 September 2022 and 29 November 2022. These were hosted at the Burgess Hall, St Ives with representatives from over 70 organisations including NHS, Police, Fire & Rescue, the further education Sector, schools, Cambridgeshire County Council, utilities providers, businesses, along with a broad range of community and voluntary organisations.

The first workshop looked at the here and now to understand what Huntingdonshire is like today. The second workshop focussed on the future with participants being inspired to think about the changes that will impact on or transform Huntingdonshire in the years up to 2050. Finally, the third workshop rounded things off by exploring the emerging Place Strategy, with participants asked to feedback on the developing themes.

Sessions with existing partnerships and forums such as the Huntingdonshire Place Board also took place on 24 November 2022 and 26 January 2023 and the Hunts Forum on 28 November 2022.

- **Town and Parish Council Engagement**

Town and Parish Councils are vital to our district. They are key stakeholders in Huntingdonshire Futures. An in-person Town and Parish Council engagement session took place at the Burgess Hall on 20 July 2022. This workshop explored the challenges and opportunities facing Huntingdonshire and captured ideas about what actions could address these in the short and longer term. Online sessions which included feedback on what we had heard as well as the emerging Place Strategy Structure were held on the 17 October 2022 and 25 January 2023. At these sessions, details were provided on how Towns & Parishes could feed into the development of the strategy. A future session is also planned in April 2023.

On 8 August 2022 and 21 October 2022, we approached Towns and Parishes via email to ask for help and support in encouraging and enabling their communities to take part in shaping the emerging strategy. In order to explore and understand what is important to residents both now and in the future, we requested information on any local community events, groups, or organisations in their area with whom we could work with.

- **Business engagement**

Huntingdonshire District Council invited senior business leaders from all over the district to a business breakfast on 18 January 2023. This event was organised to show how committed the Council is to support and grow the local economy and also to give business leaders the chance to provide feedback on the development of the emerging Place Strategy. Thirty delegates attended the session where the structure of the Place strategy was tested; with a focus on the Place Strategy journeys and pathways, how businesses could get involved and how the Council could work smarter and more collaboratively with businesses.

- **Member engagement**

Engagement with Huntingdonshire District Councillors has also taken place throughout the development of the Place Strategy. On 27 September 2022, the Member workshop hosted in the Civic Suite at Pathfinder House gave Members the chance to learn more about the opportunities and challenges facing Huntingdonshire. These discussions resulted in ideas and observations concerning how we could address potential short- and long-term solutions through the implementation of the Place Strategy. At the next Member workshop on 31 January 2023, Members reviewed the comments residents and stakeholders provided during December and January and discussed potential revisions to the strategy.

- **Online engagement**

Throughout the entire engagement process, thoughts, ideas and feedback have been gathered online via the Huntingdonshire Futures website which went live in August 2023 and has had 2,034 site visits. Around 80 social media posts have been shared across the council's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn accounts, with Facebook posts reaching an average of around 1,500 people per post. The council has also been tagged in social media posts from stakeholders who have attended the workshops and focus groups. Social Media promotion has also involved sharing posts with partners such as Town and Parish Councils, the voluntary and community sector has been used to promote opportunities for residents to find out more.

Thoughts, ideas, and feedback were gathered online during the entire engagement process through the Huntingdonshire Futures website, which went live in August 2023 and has received 2,034 site visits. The council's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn accounts have collectively posted about 80 social media messages, with Facebook posts on average reaching around 1,500 users. Stakeholders who attended the workshops and focus groups have also mentioned the council in social media posts. Social media promotion has also involved sharing posts with Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sector who have used their socials to promote opportunities for residents to find out more information on the emerging Place Strategy.

- **Online Focus Groups**

Across December 2022 and January 2023, the attention turned to testing and refining the focus of the strategy, with the emerging areas of focus shared with key partners and stakeholders. A series of online focus groups took place in January 2023 with a session on 16 January for people who have lived in Huntingdonshire for three years or less. A session took place on 17 January for people who have lived in Huntingdonshire for 15 years or more, and a session was hosted on 18 January for people who live in Huntingdonshire but work outside the district. In-person focus groups were also held at Love's Farm and Alconbury Weald on 23 January. As themes started to emerge, stakeholders were given the opportunity to complete an online questionnaire in December 2022 and early January 2023 to reflect on what was being proposed and to provide any further thoughts on the developing strategy.

Stakeholder Phase 1 Engagement: July 2022 – September 2022

During our first phase of engagement a number of key points emerged, namely:

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.

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

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.

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.

Stakeholder Phase 2 Engagement: November 2022 – January 2023

Feedback from all stakeholders led to the development of the following structure of the Place Strategy. During the second phase of engagement the structure of the strategy and areas of focus were tested and refined through a Key Directions document. This sought feedback on:

- **One Destination** – The strategy is proposed to have one destination statement. This will not be a vision of place, rather a concise statement that sets out what we will collectively reach by all stakeholders following the Place Strategy.
- **Five Journeys** – The strategy is proposed to be framed by five journeys. The Journeys represent the different focus areas that will enable all stakeholders to work towards common outcomes.
- **Twenty Pathways** – The strategy will set out 20 Pathways (four beneath each journey). Each Pathway is an articulation of the futures our stakeholders are imagining for Huntingdonshire.

Feedback on Key directions

The themes below provide an overview of the feedback on the emerging Place Strategy that was received from different stakeholders during November 2022 and January 2023. 12 responses were received via the Huntingdonshire futures website, in addition feedback was captured from **XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX**

Pride in Place

Feedback was sought from stakeholders under the emerging ‘Pride in Place’ journey and four pathways:

- What if we had a strong identity for the whole district?
- What if we had beautiful places to call home?
- What if we were incentivised to look after our own patch?
- What if our high streets were the centre of social and cultural life?

While there was support for ‘Pride in Place’, it was felt that community safety needed a stronger emphasis in the journey, especially relating to the creation of new communities and people taking care of the areas in which they live. Further feedback suggested the importance of addressing loneliness and isolation within the community, as these issues can have negative impacts on mental and physical health. By creating opportunities for social connection and support, it was suggested that this could help ensure people have a sense of belonging to the place around them and a stronger connection to others. Links between volunteering and Pride in Place were also highlighted, as was the need to make more of Huntingdonshire’s strategic location to major towns and cities such as Cambridge.

Equitable Economy

Feedback was sought from stakeholders under the emerging ‘Equitable Economy’ journey and four pathways:

- What if we become the destination for sustainable tourism?
- What if all the food we bought was grown fresh and local?
- What if our businesses and organisations worked hand in hand with young people?
- What if we created a place where start-ups could flourish?

Overall, stakeholders felt that the 'Equitable Economy' pathway presented a compelling vision for the future of Huntingdonshire and is an important area for focus if we are to create a more sustainable and equitable economy.

Stakeholders suggested that the strategy should look towards growing local food as well as buying fresh and local food. In terms of tourism, it was felt that while the Ouse Valley was mentioned, more could have been made of river usage along with the tourism opportunity that cycling can bring.

Stakeholders also noted the importance of inward investment in driving growth, creating job and developing future skills, as well as the need for greater attention to Huntingdonshire's manufacturing sector, which now contributes 25% to the region's GDP.

Further feedback indicated that the strategy needed to better reference the pivotal value of early years education and quality schools and as there was no mention of schools, further education or higher education. It was also suggested that the strategy needed to be more mindful of the value of learning new skills at all stages of life.

Environmental Innovation

Feedback was sought from stakeholders under the emerging 'Environmental Innovation' journey and four pathways:

- What if zero carbon became the norm?
- What if our natural assets inspired a new infrastructure?
- What if all our energy was produced within the district?
- What if all our children were fluent in sustainability?

Stakeholders agreed that achieving zero carbon emissions, utilising natural assets to inspire new infrastructure, and producing energy within Huntingdonshire are all crucial goals that will not only benefit the environment but will also contribute to the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the district.

However, there has to be a stronger focus on how the district's natural resources may inspire new infrastructure, as well as a better focus on increasing biodiversity. Additionally, young people need to be at the forefront of driving change by having the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process.

Health Embedded

Feedback was sought from stakeholders under the emerging 'Health Embedded' journey and four pathways:

- What if we stopped measuring GDP and started measuring happiness?
- What if it was easier to live healthily?
- What if nobody was lonely here?
- What if people of every age had the opportunity to skill up?

Stakeholders stated that additional work would need to be done to investigate community social research or use a citizen's assembly as a mechanism to collectively define happiness. It was suggested that the journey should consider promoting living independently for longer, the role leisure can play as well as reflecting how we can support healthy lifestyles for children and young people better.

Travel Transformed

Feedback was sought from stakeholders under the emerging 'Travel Transformed' journey and four pathways:

- What if the car was a relic of the past?
- What if our mobility was on demand?
- What if our distribution networks delivered for all of us?
- What if it was fun to move around here?

Overall, stakeholders agree that the "Travel Transformed" pathway offers a compelling vision for Huntingdonshire's future and should be given special attention in order to build a more sustainable and convenient transport system.

However, stakeholders were clear that the pathway 'what if the car was a relic of the past?' would be extremely difficult for people across the district as public transport can be inadequate and the car remains a necessity for many to get around, especially in rural areas. As such it was felt there is a need to reframe the pathway and that the strategy should consider alternatives to the car as the preferred method of transport.

Stakeholders suggested that the strategy has to make better reference to public transport and for it to highlight how public transport must meet user demands and be more affordable, reliable and safe for people of all ages. There were additional opinions that suggested connecting more cycle and pedestrian routes and making transit for people more enjoyable.

The strategy also needs to make better reference to public transport according to stakeholders. They want it to reflect how transport must respond to the needs of users and be more affordable, reliable and safer for people of all ages. Other observations included making travel more fun, along with making more of joined up cycle and pedestrian routes.