

**Public**  
**Key Decision – Yes**

## **HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Sustainability Appraisal for the Local Plan Update  
Further Issues and Options and Land Availability  
Assessments

**Meeting/Date:** Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and  
Growth) – 4 September 2024  
Cabinet – 10 September 2024

**Executive Portfolio:** Executive Councillor for Planning

**Report by:** Chief Planning Officer

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

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### **Executive Summary:**

Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment are statutory requirements of Local Plan preparation with them being combined into a single document to avoid repetition. It is also necessary to demonstrate that plan-making is in compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework's ambitions for sustainable development.

Sustainability Appraisal is an iterative process running across five required stages. Stage A was completed last year with the Scoping Report being issued for public engagement in February 2023. The Sustainability Appraisal includes a non-technical summary which summarises the process and progress up to autumn 2024. It lists the sustainability objectives which focus on responding to the climate emergency, tackling environmental aspects of sustainability and addressing socio-economic aspects of sustainability.

This stage is the first iteration of Stage B which seeks to develop options and appraise effects. This document includes comparative appraisals of all the options put forward in the Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper and of the sites included in the Land Availability Assessment.

It is now proposed that the Sustainability Appraisal is consulted upon alongside the Further Issues and Options consultation document and the Land Availability Assessment to allow members of the public, statutory consultees, landowners, developers and interested parties to see the results of the sustainability appraisals and to provide comments. The consultation is proposed to be held over 10 weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024.

## **Recommendations:**

The Cabinet/Committee is

### **RECOMMENDED**

- 1) To endorse the content of the Sustainability Appraisal 2024
- 2) To agree that the Sustainability Appraisal be published for public engagement for ten weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024 under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- 3) To grant delegated authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the document prior to its publication for consultation.

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

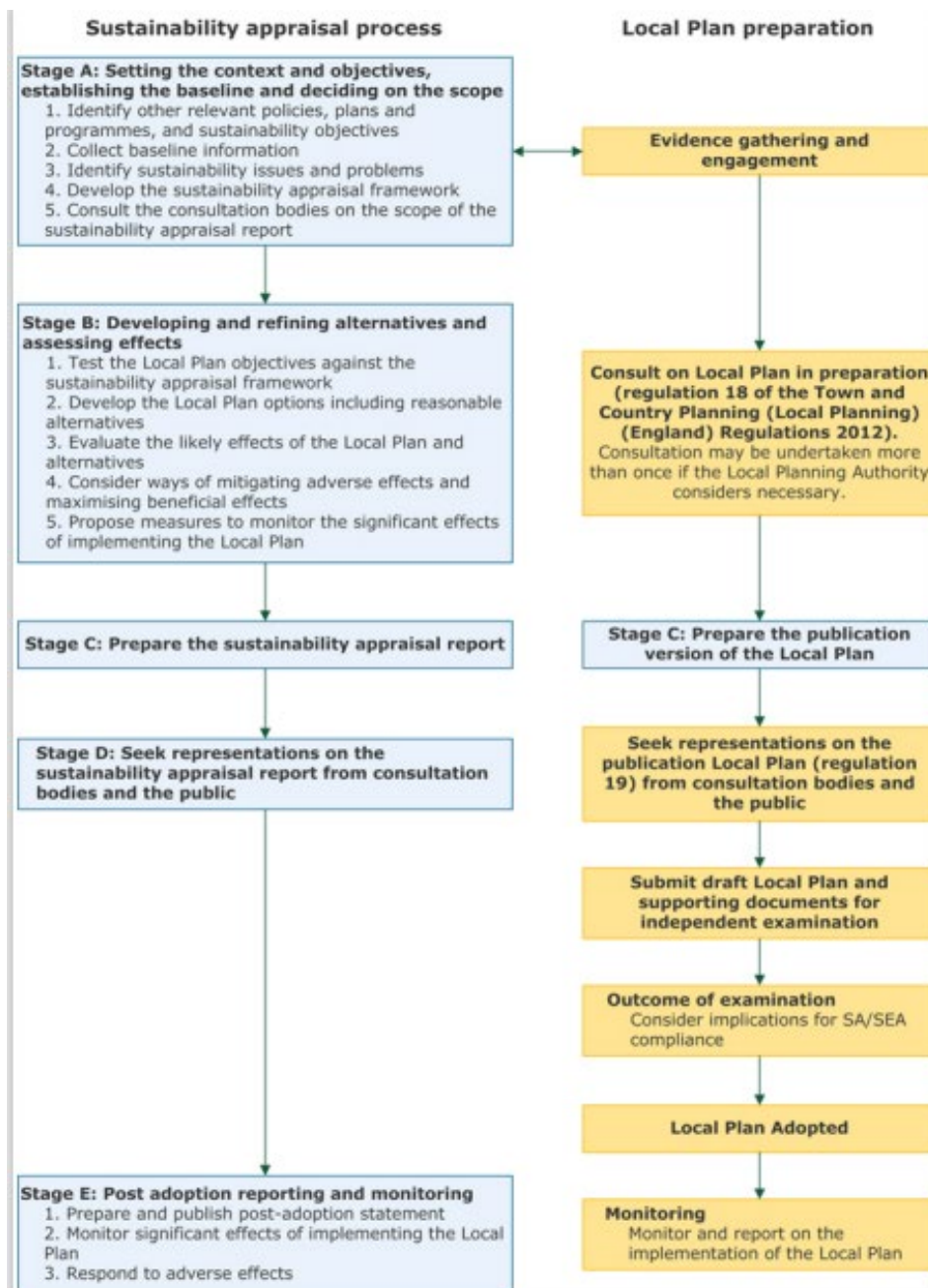
- 1.1 Sustainability Appraisal is a key statutory element of preparation of a Local Plan. This report sets out the initial draft of the Sustainability Appraisal that will accompany the Local Plan Update throughout its preparation. It is proposed to publish the Sustainability Appraisal for public engagement alongside the Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper and the Land Availability Assessment. It will provide our communities with their next opportunity to help shape the future development plan for Huntingdonshire.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Local Plans require strategic environmental assessment through the [Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#). They also require sustainability appraisal through the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 \(as amended\)](#). These requirements are typically combined into a single Sustainability Appraisal report which is the approach being taken here.
- 2.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a strong emphasis on achievement of sustainable development. NPPF paragraph 8 provides definitions of the three objectives of sustainable development which are focused as economic, social and environmental.
- 2.3 NPPF paragraph 9 states that: 'These objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans ... Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.'
- 2.4 NPPG paragraph 11 states that: 'Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.  
For plan-making this means that:
- a) all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects'.
- 2.5 The Sustainability Appraisal evaluates all proposals and allows for consideration of reasonable alternatives; it considers whether any anticipated negative impacts can be adequately mitigated by changes to the proposed plan. It is the primary way in which the Council can demonstrate to the Planning Inspector during the Local Plan's examination in public that these requirements have been met.

### 3. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL

3.1 Sustainability Appraisal is an iterative process running across five required stages. Stage A was completed last year with the Scoping Report being issued for public engagement in February 2023. This stage is the first iteration of Stage B which seeks to develop options and appraise effects. The report itself forms the first iteration of Stage C which is to present the findings from Stage B. The process is summarised in the following diagram.



3.2 The Sustainability Appraisal includes a non-technical summary which summarises the process and progress up to autumn 2024. It lists the sustainability objectives which focus on responding to the climate emergency, tackling environmental aspects of sustainability and addressing socio-economic aspects of sustainability. It also explains the development of options and appraisal of their effects at this stage.

- 3.3 At this stage the Sustainability Appraisal sets out analysis of:
- The development strategy which includes each of the topic-based chapters from the Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper. Within each topic each related set of options are assessed in a comparative table so that it is easier to see how the options perform relative to each other.
  - The sites which are assessed in the same groupings as the Land Availability Appraisals (LAA). The site sustainability appraisals provide an opportunity for consideration of detailed sustainability aspects of the sites submitted for consideration for development. They are complementary to the assessments of site potential in the LAAs with the impacts of the SA fed back into the LAA assessment to complete the comprehensive assessment of the site.
- 3.4 Each sustainability objective is provided with both a commentary and a score which is based on the following chart indicating the effect of the approach on the objective.

Score	Effect of the approach
++	Contributes significantly to the achievement of the objective
+	Contributes to the achievement of the objective
N	No clear relationship to achieving the objective, the outcome is uncertain or the outcome may depend on delivery specific factors
	The objective is not relevant to the proposal
-	Detracts from achievement of the objective
--	Significantly detracts from achievement of the objective

#### 4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 4.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be forwarded to the Cabinet prior to its consideration of this report.

#### 5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 5.1 Failure to carry out the sustainability appraisal process properly can expose the plan to legal challenge.

#### 6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN AND TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 Public engagement on the Sustainability Appraisal is proposed to be held over 10 weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024.
- 6.2 At the close of consultation, the comments made will be assessed and outcomes used to shape policy development and proposed site allocations for the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan Update.

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

- 7.1 The production of the Sustainability Appraisal aligns with Priority 2: Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations set out in the Corporate Plan 2023 to 2028, a key action of which is:

“Continue the update to the Local plan, including updating evidence bases in line with National Planning Policy, particularly where it relates to Economy, Environment and Housing.”

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Section 19 of the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 \(as amended\)](#) requires a local planning authority to carry out an SA of each of the proposals in a Local Plan during its preparation. 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*'. Sustainability appraisals incorporate the requirements of the [2004 Environmental Assessment Regulations](#), meaning the SA and SEA are carried out together as part of the preparation of planning documents and are collectively known as the SA process.

## **9. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Population and health is one of the required considerations within the Sustainability Appraisal process. This is primarily addressed within the socio-economic group of objectives including basic health related aspects such as provision of shelter through access to housing that meets people's needs, promotion of social inclusion to support people's mental well-being and promotion of active travel opportunities for physical health. Other health related aspects are addressed through objectives related to responding to the climate emergency including adaptability and resilience of developments, provision of green infrastructure and promotion of participation in healthy lifestyles through nature based or outdoor leisure activities and minimisation of pollution.

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

- 10.1 Paragraph 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that 'planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account, to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.' This includes ensuring that the Local Plan and its policies meet the principles of sustainable development; achieving net gains from an economic, social and environmental perspective defined in NPPF paragraph 8 as follows:

- a) 'an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.'

10.2 The Council's response to climate change and promotion of environmental sustainability run throughout the Sustainability Appraisal. Three objectives relate specifically to the response to the climate emergency with a further five relating specifically to environmental issues. These will all shape the content of the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan Update. The Local Plan Update is also supported by a series of evidence base documents relating to climate change providing expert recommendations on the approaches to be taken.

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

11.1 Public engagement on the Sustainability Appraisal is an integral part of preparation of the Local Plan Update. It will also contribute towards achieving action 32 of the Corporate Plan 2023 – 2028's annual Action Plan for this year, "Continue the update to the Local plan, including updating evidence bases in line with National Planning Policy, particularly where it relates to Economy, Environment and Housing.". Receipt and consideration of responses from residents, businesses, organisations and other stakeholders will contribute towards preparation of the Preferred Options Draft Local Plan Update.

11.2 The recommendations are therefore:

- To approve the contents of the Sustainability Appraisal
- To agree that the Sustainability Appraisal be published for public consultation for ten weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024.
- To grant delegated authority to the Chief Planning Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning to make any necessary typographical or other minor changes to the document prior to its publication for consultation.

## **12. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Sustainability Appraisal

## **13. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- [Cabinet report 24 January 2023 - Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report](#)
- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004](#)
- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

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