

Public
Key Decision - Yes

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Land Availability Assessments

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

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Planning

Report by: Chief Planning Officer

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

When developing local plans, the Council must adhere to Government legislation and policy such as the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph 23 of the National Planning Policy Framework requires that strategic policies in plans should provide a clear strategy for bringing sufficient land forward, to address objectively assessed needs over the plan period “This should include planning for and allocating sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area.”

Between 29 March to 7 June 2023 the Council issued a Call for Sites. This is a process where people, including but not limited to, developers, landowners and agents could submit sites that could have the potential to be allocated in the next Local Plan. The sites submitted could be for a variety of uses such as housing, employment, renewable energy, biodiversity, and mixed uses. An ongoing Call for Sites is also still running for those who may have missed the initial Call.

The Council has assessed the sites submitted through a Land Availability Assessment and a Sustainability Appraisal (of which more information can be found in the main body of this report). The results of these assessments do not guarantee that a site will be allocated in the next local plan, but instead provide a selection of sites that have potential. The final selection of sites will be based on a number of additional factors such as a chosen growth strategy, a final settlement hierarchy and evidence-based documents such as transport studies, strategic flood risk assessments, water cycle studies, employment land studies, climate change reports etc. Many of these topics are covered within the Further Issues and Options Consultation document to join up this process and provide opportunity for the public to comment on the way forward, choose their preferred options and provide additional information.

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

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet/Committee is

RECOMMENDED

- To approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessments
- To agree that the Land Availability Assessments 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.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose and content of the Land Availability Assessments and asks that Cabinet approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessments and agree that it can be published for public engagement for ten weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY?

- 2.1 The production of a local plan is enforced and guided by Statutory Instruments (Orders, Rules and Regulations) and Acts of Parliament (Acts). Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 specifically identifies matters that must be taken into account when preparing a local plan. This includes national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).

- 2.2 The NPPF requires that local plans should plan for and allocate sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area (paragraph 23). More specifically paragraph 69 asks that:

“Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.”

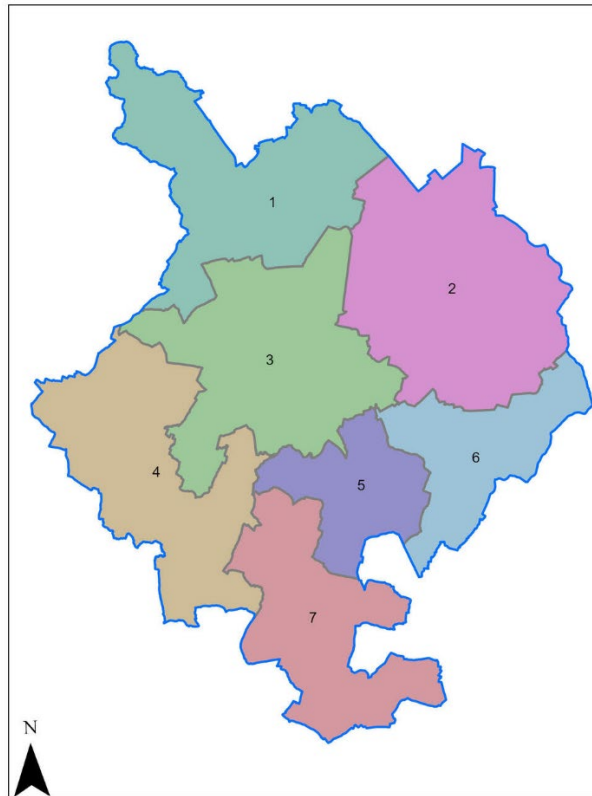
- 2.3 To do this the Council issued a Call for Sites. This is a process where people, including but not limited to, developers, landowners and agents could submit sites that could have the potential to be allocated in the next Local Plan. These sites were then assessed through the Land Availability Assessments presented alongside this report to fulfil this obligation.

3. Land Availability Assessments - Sites and Documents

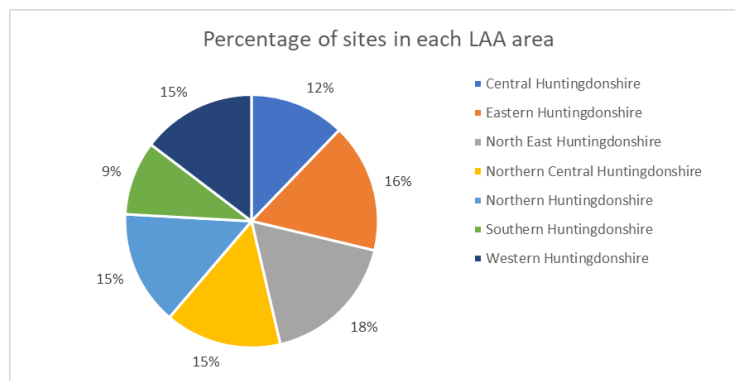
- 3.1 Between 29 March to 7 June 2023 the Council issued a Call for Sites. This is a process where people, including but not limited to, developers, landowners and agents could submit sites that could have the potential to be allocated in the next Local Plan. The sites submitted could be for a variety of uses such as housing, employment, renewable energy, biodiversity, and mixed uses. 354 sites were submitted during the initial Call and have been assessed. An ongoing Call for Sites is also still running for those who may have missed the initial Call; 15 sites submitted through this process have been assessed. Any sites submitted after 15 August 2024 will be assessed at a later date.

- 3.2 The total number of sites that have been assessed are 369 sites. The sites submitted included a variety of uses:
- 235 were for residential uses
 - 49 were for commercial uses
 - 74 were for mixed uses including, but not limited to, housing, employment and some infrastructure provision
 - 2 were for renewable energy
 - 7 were for natural / open space or biodiversity net gain
 - 2 were for infrastructure
 - 12 of the above were strategic sites which is defined as mixed or residential uses on sites capable of providing over 3,000 homes hectares or commercial uses capable of providing over 120,000sqm of commercial floorspace
 - 83 of the above sites were 1 hectare or less in size
- 3.3 These sites have been assessed using the Land Availability Assessment Methodology. The draft methodology was presented to Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) on 1st March 2023 and Cabinet on 21st March 2023. Public consultation was undertaken on the draft methodology between the 29 March and 20 May 2023. Following this the responses were assessed and final amendments made to the methodology. This methodology is published as a background document on the Local Plan Update [evidence library](#) webpages for transparency. The council's response to comments made can be found in the Statement of Consultation which will also be published alongside the consultation and uploaded to the evidence library.
- 3.4 Each site assessment has been presented to the Local Plans Advisory Group, discussion of which took place between April and August 2024.
- 3.5 Due to the number of sites submitted and assessed, the Land Availability Assessments were not able to be displayed in one comprehensive document. Instead the assessments were broken down into a suite of documents. This also allows for easier navigation for those who may only be interested in sites in their nearby area of work or residence. The documents were divided as follows:
1. *Northern Huntingdonshire* – which includes sites from the Stilton, Folksworth & Washingley; Yaxley wards
 2. *North Eastern Huntingdonshire* - which includes sites from the Ramsey; Somersham; Warboys wards
 3. *Northern Central Huntingdonshire* - which includes sites from the Alconbury; Sawtry; the Stukeleys wards
 4. *Western Huntingdonshire* - which includes sites from the Great Staughton; Kimbolton wards
 5. *Central Huntingdonshire* - which includes sites from the Brampton; Godmanchester & Hemingford Abbots; Huntingdon wards
 6. *Eastern Huntingdonshire* - which includes sites from the Fenstanton; Hemingford Grey & Houghton; Holywell-cum-Needingworth; St Ives wards

7. *Southern Huntingdonshire* - which includes sites from the Buckden; Great Paxton; St Neots wards



3.6 The number of sites were distributed relatively evenly across these areas:



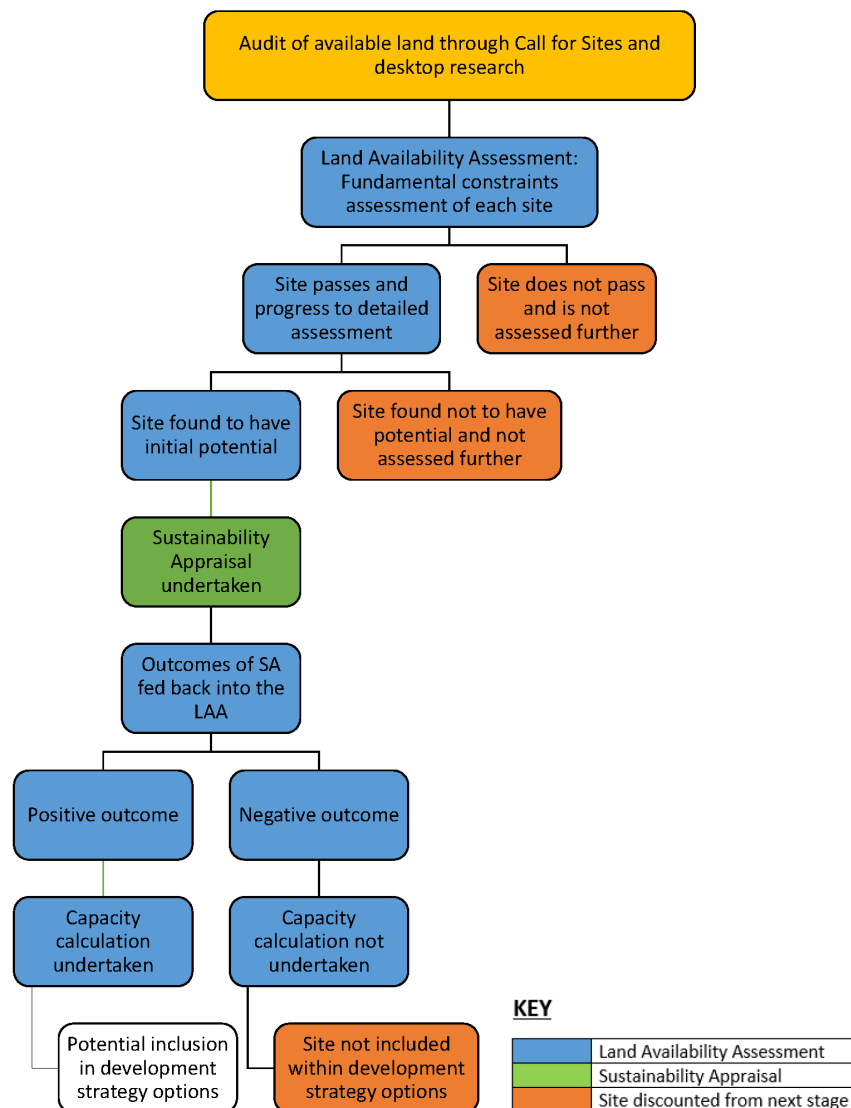
4. LAND AVAILABILITY ASSESSMENTS – CONTENT

4.1 The NPPF requires that local plans should plan for and allocate sufficient sites to deliver the strategic priorities of the area (paragraph 23). More specifically paragraph 69 asks that:

“Strategic policy-making authorities should have a clear understanding of the land available in their area through the preparation of a strategic housing land availability assessment. From this, planning policies should identify a sufficient supply and mix of sites, taking into account their availability, suitability and likely economic viability.”

- 4.2 In addition National Planning Practice Guidance sets out further detail on this within the [Housing and economic land availability assessment](#) section.
- 4.3 To adhere to the NPPF and NPPG the first stage for each site within the Land Availability Assessments was to see if they have any fundamental constraints which would render the site undeliverable, for example, if it is located within flood zone 3b. This information can be found within the site's assessment under the title 'Fundamental Constraints'. Any sites that do not pass the fundamental constraints are assessed no further.
- 4.4 Secondly if the site passes the fundamental constraints the site is more comprehensively assessed within the 'Assessment of Site Potential Table'. The assessment is in line with the national requirements based on the following defined criteria:
- **Suitable** – a high-level assumption on whether a site would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated (*found under the heading 'Context, constraints and potential suitability'*). This is a local plan 'policy-off' assessment meaning that the site is not assessed against the policies within Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036.
 - **Available** – no legal or ownership impediments exist to inhibit development which can come forward in the short term (*found under the heading 'Availability'*)
 - **Achievable** - there is a reasonable prospect that viable development could be built on the site at a particular point in time (*found under the heading 'Achievability'*)
 - **Deliverable** – a housing site should be available, in a suitable location and have a realistic prospect of homes being built within 5 years (*found under the heading 'Deliverability/ Developability'*)
 - **Developable** – a housing site should be suitable and have a reasonable prospect of being built at a specified time (*found under the heading 'Deliverability/ Developability'*)
- 4.5 If the site passes this assessment a sustainability appraisal is conducted which can be found in the Sustainability Appraisal document (presented at [Cabinet 10 September 2024](#) and [Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance and Growth 4 September 2024](#)). The Council has an obligation through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to carry out a sustainability appraisal. This must look at how plans and programmes, and more specifically in this instance, our sites, contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. In combination with other regulatory requirements such as the Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004, this allows the sites to be assessed on their contribution towards environmental, social and economic issues. To tie in this assessment with the Land Availability Assessments a summary box is provided within each site's assessment which reports on 'The impact of the Sustainability Appraisal on the Assessment'

- 4.6 If the site is still considered potentially suitable after considering the sustainability appraisal a capacity calculation is undertaken to indicate the potential capacity of the site, for example the potential number of homes, commercial floorspace, when the site could be delivered and how long it may take to be delivered.
- 4.7 A diagram is provided below to illustrate the process which has been outlined above.



5. RESULTS AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Of the 369 sites assessed:
- 39 did not pass the fundamental constraints
 - 34 did not pass the detailed LAA assessment (found in the 'Assessment of Site Potential Table' in the LAA for each site) and therefore did not progress to a sustainability appraisal

- 104 sites were considered unsuitable after the results of the sustainability appraisal were taken into account and therefore did not progress further
 - 192 were ultimately considered potentially suitable for development and a capacity calculation was undertaken
- 5.2 In combination, the sites considered potentially suitable for allocation would generate approximately:
- 53,134 homes
 - 2,900,145.23 sqm of commercial floorspace plus an additional 109.26ha of employment land with no floorspace capacity calculated.
 - 134.436 hectares of land for renewables
 - 69.367ha of land for infrastructure
 - 1,158.861 hectares of land for open space/biodiversity net gain
- 5.3 This leaves a substantial 'package' of sites which could be considered potentially suitable for allocation within the local plan, to allow us to choose the most sustainable growth strategy.
- 5.4 The results of these assessments do not guarantee that a site will be allocated in the next local plan, but instead provide a selection of sites that have potential. The final selection of sites will be based on a number of additional factors such as a chosen growth strategy, a final settlement hierarchy and evidence-based documents such as transport studies, strategic flood risk assessments, water cycle studies, employment land studies, climate change reports etc. Many of these topics are covered within the Further Issues and Options Consultation document to join up this process and provide opportunity for the public to comment on the way forward, choose their preferred options and provide additional information.
- 5.5 It is now proposed that these assessments are consulted upon alongside the Further Issues and Options consultation document and the Sustainability Appraisal to allow members of the public, statutory consultees, landowners, developers and interested parties to see the results of the Land Availability Assessments and to provide comments. The consultation is proposed to be held over 10 weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024.

6. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

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

7. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

- 7.1 Public engagement on the Land Availability Assessments is proposed to be held over 10 weeks between 18 September and 27 November 2024.
- 7.2 At the close of consultation, the comments made will be assessed and changes made, or further investigations undertaken where considered appropriate. Any changes made will be documented in the Land Availability Assessment documents for the appropriate site under the title 'Updates after the Initial Assessment'.
- 7.3 The results of these assessments do not guarantee that a site will be allocated in the next local plan, but instead provide a selection of sites that have potential. The final selection of sites will be based on a number of additional factors such as a chosen growth strategy, a final settlement hierarchy and evidence-based documents such as transport studies, strategic flood risk assessments, water cycle studies, employment land studies, climate change reports etc. Many of these topics are covered within the Further Issues and Options Consultation document to join up this process and provide opportunity for the public to comment on the way forward, choose their preferred options and provide additional information.

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

- 8.1 The production of the Land Availability Assessments 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.”

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 To be effective Local Plans need to be kept up to date. As set out in Regulation 10a of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating. Approval was received from Cabinet on 24th January 2023:

'To agree to the commencement of work to compile an updated local evidence base to inform and support preparation of the full update to the adopted Local Plan, working with partners and consultants as necessary'

- 9.2 The assessment of sites through the Land Availability Assessment is part of this process.

- 9.3 Providing a comprehensive assessment of sites will also ensure that the Council can justify their decisions when the Local Plan is independently examined by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of the Secretary of State.
- 9.4 The Government recently published a consultation on a revised NPPF [Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system), in addition an Planning and Infrastructure Bill is proposed. These proposed changes may alter the requirements of the Local Plan. However, the assessment of suitable sites and the availability of land required to meet growth is considered to remain a priority.

10. HEALTH, 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.'

(NPPF, paragraph 8)

10.2 The review of the sites through the LAA and Sustainability Appraisal is part of this process. The choice of sites suitable for allocation (identified in combination with other evidence), will contribute towards identify the most sustainable and achievable way to plan development sustainably, creating positive impacts on health, the environment and climate change.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 11.1 Engagement on the Land Availability Assessments is considered beneficial in meeting the Council's Corporate Plan objectives. In particular it meets the required key action "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." The details of the engagement proposals are set out in the report on the Further Issues and Options Engagement Paper.
- 11.2 It is a key first step towards the development of an evidence base to support preparation of a full update to the Local Plan as approved at Cabinet on 24th January 2023.
- 11.3 Engagement on the Land Availability Assessment also adheres to the Corporate Plan's central approach which notes that "Our role is to help residents and businesses thrive, but that is not something we can do to people. Only by working with people can we make sure Huntingdonshire is a place where you and your family can have a good life and take advantage of the options that benefit you" The consultation will allow people and organisations to feed into the site assessment process and provide comment and additional information which may be of benefit.
- 11.4 The choice of sites suitable for allocation (identified in combination with other evidence), will contribute towards realising the ambition to work towards the most sustainable and achievable way to plan development, creating positive impacts on health, the environment and climate change. This in turn will help the Local Plan to demonstrate that it can achieve the principles of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework by taking into account social, economic and environmental considerations.
- 11.5 The recommendations are therefore:
- To approve the contents of the Land Availability Assessments
 - To agree that the Land Availability Assessments 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

Appendices: Land Availability Assessments –

- **Appendix 1:** Northern Huntingdonshire – which includes sites from the Stilton, Folksworth & Washingley; Yaxley wards
- **Appendix 2:** North Eastern Huntingdonshire - which includes sites from the Ramsey; Somersham; Warboys wards

- **Appendix 3:** Northern Central Huntingdonshire - which includes sites from the Alconbury; Sawtry; the Stukeleys wards
- **Appendix 4:** Western Huntingdonshire - which includes sites from the Great Staughton; Kimbolton wards
- **Appendix 5:** Central Huntingdonshire - which includes sites from the Brampton; Godmanchester & Hemingford Abbots; Huntingdon wards
- **Appendix 6:** Eastern Huntingdonshire - which includes sites from the Fenstanton; Hemingford Grey & Houghton; Holywell-cum-Needingworth; St Ives wards
- **Appendix 7:** Southern Huntingdonshire - which includes sites from the Buckden; Great Paxton; St Neots wards

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Cabinet - Tuesday, 24 January 2023](#)
- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004](#)
- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)
- [Land Availability Assessment Methodology](#)
- Further Issues and Options consultation presented [at Cabinet 10 September 2024](#) and [Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance and Growth 4 September 2024](#)
- Sustainability Appraisal presented at [Cabinet 10 September 2024](#) and [Overview and Scrutiny Panel - Performance and Growth 4 September 2024](#)
- Statement of Consultation – to be published in the Local Plan’s [Evidence Library](#) prior to consultation

CONTACT OFFICER

Name/Job Title: Frances Schulz /Senior Planning Policy Officer
 Tel No: 01480 388432
 Email: frances.schulz@huntingdonshire.gov.uk