

Public
Key Decision – Yes/No
* Delete as applicable

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper for the Local Plan Update

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

Executive Summary:

Local Plan preparation is highly shaped by statutory requirements. A local planning authority is required under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 to invite representations on the potential content of any future development plan document.

Engagement on the content of the Local Plan Update started at the beginning of 2023. The three 'Issues Engagement Papers' from published for engagement in April 2023 have been analysed and the responses have contributed to the next stage of preparation of the Local Plan Update.

This report presents the proposed Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper which gives options on potential strategy and policy areas for inclusion in the Local Plan Update. Its purpose is to provide our communities with their next opportunity to help shape the future development plan for Huntingdonshire. This report is linked to those on the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal which all form part of this set of engagement opportunities.

A communications plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Communications team. The intention is to use a multi-channel approach to communications to try to maximise the diversity of residents, organisations and businesses who can engage with and make comments on the Further Issues and Options 2024. A 10 week engagement period is proposed to run from 18 September to 27 November 2024.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet/Committee is

RECOMMENDED

- 1) To endorse the content of the Further Issues and Options 2024
- 2) To agree that the Further Issues and Options 2024 paper 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 Report prior to its publication for consultation.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Public engagement is a key element of preparation of a Local Plan. This report presents an engagement document which gives options on potential strategy and policy areas for inclusion in the Local Plan Update. This is to provide our communities with their next opportunity to help shape the future development plan for Huntingdonshire. This report is linked to those on the Land Availability Assessments and Sustainability Appraisal which all form part of this set of engagement opportunities.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper builds on the series of engagement opportunities that took place throughout the spring and early summer of 2023. In particular, it responds to comments that were made on the series of Issues Engagement Papers (full, summary and easy read) and builds these into options for inclusion in the Preferred Options draft Local Plan Update for next year.
- 2.2 A local planning authority is required under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 to invite representations from specific and general consultations bodies, residents and those carrying on businesses within the district on what the Local Plan should contain. This is reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework in paragraph 16c). This engagement opportunity would fulfil this statutory requirement. The engagement will align with the methods established in the Statement of Community Involvement approved by Cabinet on 24 January 2023.
- 2.3 Regulation 22 (1) (c) of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended), asks that the Council provides a document to demonstrate how the plan has been shaped. This Statement of Consultation forms a supporting document to preparation of the Local Plan. It reports the engagement opportunities that were made available throughout spring and early summer 2023 on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping report, the Statement of Community Involvement, the Sustainability of Settlements (Settlement Hierarchy) and Land Availability Assessment methodologies, the Call for Sites and the Issues Engagement Papers. The Statement of Consultation summarises the comments and representations received to each of these and explains how we have taken them into account in preparation of this stage. It is an iterative document with this forming the initial version of it; it will be updated after each main phase of engagement.

3. FURTHER ISSUES AND OPTIONS 2024 ENGAGEMENT PAPER

- 3.1 The Further Issues and Options 2024 engagement paper (Appendix 1) starts with an executive summary which highlights the topics that are covered and stresses that people do not need to read all of it, they are welcome to jump straight to the topics they are interested in and only read

and respond on those areas of interest if they wish to. This is followed by an Introduction which explains what we have to do, what we have done so far towards updating the Local Plan, how the document is structured and how it links to other aspects of this phase of engagement which are addressed in the related two reports also being presented to this meeting.

3.2 This is followed by 11 topic-based chapters covering:

- Local Plan Vision and Objectives – what sort of place we want to be and how we achieve sustainable development
- A Settlement Hierarchy for Huntingdonshire – how we can group our towns and villages based on their service provision, size and function
- Approach to Economy and Employment – how and where we should try to grow our local economy
- Housing Figures and Requirement – how we support provision of the homes needed here
- Achieving Well Designed Places – what our design aspirations are for creating high quality places
- Growth Strategy Options – illustrates different ways we could distribute new development around the district
- Our Green and Blue Infrastructure – looks at how we balanced growth with nature and open space to support biodiversity, recreation and landscape enhancement
- The Approach to Climate Change – how we can contribute to national objectives on emissions reductions and ambitious we should be
- Tackling Flooding and Water – how we manage our limited water supplies and minimise the impacts of flood risk
- Housing Tenures and Housing Mix – focuses on the housing choices people have and how we meet the needs of specific groups within our community
- Transport and Connectivity – considers how we can contribute towards reducing the need to travel and promoting access to sustainable and active travel choices

3.3 Each topic-based chapter is structured in a consistent manner to help people navigate the document. The four sections are:

- Introduction - to briefly explain the issue
- What you told us - a summary of the points raised in 2023's Issues Engagement Papers
- What is this about? - a discussion of our adopted policies, changes in national policy and guidance since they were agreed in 2019 and what any evidence we have so far is telling us
- What should we do? - this sets out the options that we think might be possible and asks for opinions on them

3.4 A choice of options is presented within each topic-based chapter with the number of options varying depending on the nature of the issue. This is part of enabling us to demonstrate through the Examination in public process that we have considered reasonable alternatives to the

approaches that we include in the Local plan Update. Most sets of options also include the opportunity for people to suggest an alternative option should they wish to. Direct questions are posed on some issues to explore them where this approach is more appropriate.

4. PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

- 4.1 The intention is to use a multi-channel approach to communications to try to maximise the diversity of residents, organisations and businesses who can engage with and make comments on the Further Issues and Options 2024. A 10 week engagement period is proposed to run from 18 September to 27 November 2024.
- 4.2 A communications plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Communications team which will cover online, social media, face to face and traditional media methods of publicising the engagement opportunities. Videos will be used to present accessible information on the engagement opportunities.
- 4.3 All material will also be available through our online engagement portal and information and links added on Let's Talk Huntingdonshire and the Council's main website.
- 4.4 At the time of writing this report workshops are proposed specifically for Members and Town and Parish Councils to provide support through explaining the purpose and content of the Further Issues and Options 2024 and other related engagement opportunities (particularly the site assessments). These are also proposed to provide advice and support on how to respond to the engagement opportunities. Workshops and individual meetings will also be held with other stakeholder groups, such as adjoining local authorities, to ensure the requirements of the duty to co-operate are met.
- 4.5 To provide face to face engagement opportunities seven exhibitions are proposed around the district at Huntingdon, Kimbolton, Ramsey, Sawtry, St Ives, St Neots and Yaxley. The opportunity will be taken to attend other events such as the Parishes Forum and the Annual Climate Conference.
- 4.6 Social media, banners in places such as parks, posters on the Council's refuse freighters will all be used to draw attention to engagement opportunities. The support of Members and Town and Parish Councils will be sought to raise awareness, for example through provision of posters for local noticeboards.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The comments of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be circulated to the Cabinet prior to its consideration of the report.

6. RISKS

- 6.1 An updated draft National Planning Policy framework was published for consultation was launched on 30 July 2024 and will close on 24 September 2024. This will change the policy environment within which the Local Plan Update is prepared. The government intends to reintroduce mandatory housing targets and has put forward a revised 'standard method' for calculating the number of new homes the Local Plan is expected to accommodate. The housing requirement options set out in chapter 6 take account of this proposed change by including both the potential number of homes required through the current approved methodology and the potential number through the draft proposed methodology.
- 6.2 The Planning and Infrastructure Bill was introduced during the King's speech on 17 July 2024. This includes proposals for improving land assembly processes which may impact the Local Plan preparation process, particularly regarding the overall growth strategy and potential site allocation choices.

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

- 7.1 The Further Issues and Options 2024 aligns strongly with priority 2 of the Corporate Plan 2023-2028 which seeks to create a better Huntingdonshire for future generations. It contains options relating to each aspect of 'Improving housing', 'Forward thinking economic growth' and 'Lowering our carbon emissions'. It also aligns with priority 1 on improving the quality of life for local people through options relating to creating well-designed places that people are proud to call home, providing affordable homes to help those who need them and attracting employers and visitors.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council must follow due Regulations in preparing the Local Plan. Eventually, once the final document is adopted, the Council has a legal duty to determine planning applications in accordance with development plan policies unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are limited financial resource implications directly for the engagement work, primarily for exhibition hall hire and board production, publicity materials and printing. Staffing for the exhibitions will be drawn from across the wider Planning department. The Local Plan Update has a rolling budget for preparation to cover the costs of specialisation evidence preparation by consultants and legal representation for the examination in public stage. The Further Issues and Options public engagement will also

encompass that for the Land Availability Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal that are presented in the two following items.

10. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The well-designed places element of the Further Issues and Options contains a strong focus on facilitating healthy lifestyle choices through incorporation of active travel routes within new developments. The more detailed design aspects that will result from this and the influence of the climate change response will assist with long term health implications relating to aspects such as heating and cooling of buildings and air pollution.

11. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 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.'

- 11.2 The Council's response to climate change and promotion of environmental sustainability run throughout the Further Issues and Options 2024. In particular, chapter 10 directly sets out options regarding climate change and the Council's level of ambition and approaches in responding to these. Other aspects of our response are addressed through topic-based chapters such as Flooding and Water and Achieving Well Designed Places. The Local Plan Update is supported by a series of evidence base documents relating to climate change providing expert recommendations on the approaches to be taken.

12. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Equalities impact assessment is not required at this stage of Local Plan preparation as there are no draft policies yet.

13. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

13.1 Public engagement is a statutorily required element of local plan preparation. 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.

13.2 The recommendations are therefore:

- To endorse the content of the Further Issues and Options 2024
- To agree that the Further Issues and Options 2024 paper 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
- 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.

14. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Further Issues and Options 2024

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Cabinet report 18 April 2023 – Local Plan Issues Engagement Papers](#)
- [Cabinet report 24 January 2023 – Huntingdonshire Local Plan Review and Proposed Update](#)
- [Cabinet report 24 January 2023 – Statement of Community Involvement 2023](#)
- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [Environment Assessment of Plans and Programmes 2004](#)
- [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

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