Pre-Submission Local Plan to 2046 Sustainability Appraisal and Supporting Documents

Comments of Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth)

1.1 The Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 2nd September 2026.

1.2 The Chair queried why Councillor Sanderson's position on Local Plan appeared to have changed compared to the adopted Local Plan, noting that he had previously voted against that.

1.3 The Panel heard that Councillor Sanderson considered his opposition to the previous Local Plan to have been a mistake and urged members not to make the same error. He emphasised the importance of having development guided by a robust, infrastructure-led Local Plan rather than being driven by developers. He also highlighted the significant amount of work undertaken over the previous three and a half years to prepare the Plan.

1.4 In response to a question from Councillor Seeff, the Panel was advised that the term *home* in the report referred to an individual unit of accommodation of any form capable of being occupied by a single person, a family or other household. It was also confirmed that infrastructure planning was based on projected population growth arising from the number of new homes expected to be delivered across the district.

1.5 Councillor McIlwain sought clarification on the number of homes referenced, noting that the figure stated at the meeting differed from that contained within the Local Plan. He also requested that the proposal relating to Upwood be referred to as Upwood rather than Ramsey in future references.

1.6 In response, the Panel was advised that the Local Plan provides for 32,200 homes between 2021 and 2046, of which approximately 4,200 had already been completed and 11,300 had existing planning permission. Regarding the naming of the proposal, members were informed that for consistency with the evidence base it would preferably remain listed under Ramsey for the current consultation stage, with the potential for amendment at a later stage. Councillor McIlwain agreed to this approach.

1.7 In response to a question regarding infrastructure relating to rural areas by Councillor Gardener, the Panel's attention was drawn to the Infrastructure Readiness Report set out in Appendix 7 to the report. It was confirmed that extensive consultation was undergone with Infrastructure providers and this has enabled them to plan when the infrastructure is required and when it will come forward. The Local Plan would provide certainty so that they can phase development. A stepped trajectory has been included to allow the infrastructure to be phased alongside the development across the entire Plan period.

1.8 Councillor Gardener went on to seek clarification that no development would take place until the infrastructure is in place.

1.9 The Panel was advised that, in the absence of a Local Plan, planning applications could still be submitted by developers. However, having an adopted Local Plan provides a clear vision for growth and a delivery trajectory, enabling officers to work proactively with developers and infrastructure providers to ensure that the necessary infrastructure is planned and delivered alongside development.

1.10 Councillor Cawley wondered what the fallback was if the A141 does not come to fruition as the infrastructure appears to be relying on this for North Huntingdonshire.

1.11 The Panel was advised that the plan covers a 25-year period and that national planning guidance requires plans to be flexible enough to respond to changing economic circumstances. Members were informed that the Council had been working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority since 2018 to progress the A141 scheme, and that the economic growth potential of North Huntingdonshire had been recognised within the Combined Authority's plans. The Panel heard that the A141 remained a priority project and was expected to be delivered. However, officers acknowledged that circumstances could change over time and advised that the Council would review its position if necessary. It was further noted that deliverability forms a key part of the Local Plan examination process and that the Council would continue to adapt its plans in response to changing conditions. It was confirmed that partnership working would continue to seek to promote deliverability. Need to help our residents understand that we will constantly watch the plan's implementation.

1.12 Councillor Hassall raised concerns regarding infrastructure capacity, particularly in relation to wastewater provision. He noted that constraints in water supply and treatment infrastructure could affect the type of economic development that could be supported in the district and suggested that many high-quality employment sectors had significant water requirements.

1.13 The Panel was advised that it was not unusual for the full funding package for infrastructure projects to be in place at the outset of the plan-making process. Officers acknowledged the infrastructure challenges facing the district and emphasised the importance of a plan-led approach to growth, enabling the Council to work with developers, Government, service providers and transport authorities to secure and deliver infrastructure alongside development. Members were informed that, without a Local Plan, development would be considered on an individual application basis, making it more difficult to secure strategic infrastructure beyond that required to mitigate the impact of specific sites. The Panel also heard that the Local Plan had been developed to support a range of employment opportunities and that water supply pressures were being addressed through planned investment, including new pipelines and water storage infrastructure expected to come forward during the 2030s.

1.14 Councillor Hassall noted that some residents had expressed the view that it may be preferable not to proceed with a Local Plan at the present time if there was a risk that it would not be found sound by the Planning Inspector

1.15 The Panel was advised that independent examination was an important part of the Local Plan process, with Planning Inspectors commonly recommending modifications as part of their role. Members were informed that this process is conducted transparently and in public. The Panel was also reminded that councils are expected by Government to maintain an up-to-date Local Plan and that, without one, it becomes more difficult to resist inappropriate development proposals.

1.16 Speaking from a rural perspective, Councillor Gardener sought clarification on the evidence supporting assumptions of a significant shift away from private car use. He noted that many rural communities have limited alternative transport options and questioned how such a change in travel behaviour could be achieved in those areas.

1.17 The Panel was advised that officers had worked with Cambridgeshire County Council as the highway authority on the Strategic Transport Study, which used the Combined Authority's latest CaPCAM transport model. Members heard that the model reflects Huntingdonshire's predominantly rural character by dividing the district into more than 200 areas and assessing factors such as growth potential and access to public transport. It was explained that major developments, including new communities, would be expected to incorporate significant active travel and sustainable transport infrastructure. However, officers acknowledged that in many rural villages private cars would remain the principal mode of transport.

1.18 Councillor Gardner wondered if developers would be looking at providing transportation to an industrial site for workers.

1.19 The Panel was advised that it was not uncommon for developers to subsidise public transport services in the early phases of development, particularly where passenger numbers were not yet sufficient to support a viable service. Members heard that such arrangements would depend on factors including the nature of the development, the type of transport provided and operational considerations.

1:20 Councillor Cawley raised concerns on behalf of residents of Ellington regarding the impact of development at Brampton Cross on the A14, particularly the diversion of HGV traffic through the village and the resulting damage caused. He requested that, when relevant planning applications are considered, developers should be required to fund any necessary improvements to the A14 and A1 junctions arising from their proposals.

1:21 The Panel was reminded that the purpose of the agenda item was to consider the Local Plan and that Brampton Cross is not proposed as an allocation. However, the strength of local feeling regarding Brampton Cross was acknowledged, and members were advised that, should a planning application come forward for the site,

there would be an opportunity for stakeholder engagement as part of the planning process.

1:22 Councillor Tomlinson sought clarification on the consequences of failing to meet the 31st December deadline. He also asked whether a risk assessment had been undertaken and what impact any delay would have on the Local Plan timetable.

1:23 The Panel was advised that failing to meet the 31st December deadline would have significant implications, as it would be difficult to carry the Local Plan forward into the new legislative arrangements. Members heard that there would be fewer consultation opportunities available and that much of the work undertaken to date could not simply be transferred. Missing the deadline would require the Council to issue a notice of intent and restart the Local Plan process, resulting in an estimated delay of around 30 months. Officers also confirmed that the Council would consider undertaking a risk review.

1:24 Councillor Blackwell raised the issue of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), commenting that Members were advised this was not a reason to hold off on the Local Plan but she wondered if wider aspects had been considered.

1:25 The Panel was advised that the Council would be in a stronger position if it had an up-to-date Local Plan in place, particularly one focused on delivering the infrastructure needed across the district. Reference was made to authorities, including Surrey, that had already undergone local government reorganisation. Members were informed that Shadow Authorities could not formally commence the Local Plan process and attention was drawn to Section 10 of the report, which outlined the implications of local government reorganisation for the Plan.

1:26 Councillor Ascroft raised concerns regarding the financial implications of delaying the Local Plan and queried whether the costs associated with such a decision would need to be justified not only to Members but also to the public.

1:27 The Panel was advised that officers had a clear understanding of both the expenditure incurred on the Local Plan to date and the anticipated costs through to its completion. It was confirmed that approximately £780,000 had been spent on the preparation of the Local Plan so far.

1:28 In response to a comment by Councillor McIlwain, it was confirmed that there would likely be additional costs to come for the examination process but wanted to assure Members that they have been as prudent as possible, including doing joint evidence studies with internal colleagues.

1:29 Councillor Seeff emphasised the importance of infrastructure planning but noted the significant dependencies and uncertainties involved in its delivery. He observed that much of the required social infrastructure would be secured through Section 106 Agreements and referred to Wintringham as an example where the necessary healthcare provision had not yet been fully delivered. He also sought clarification on

the proposed healthcare expansion at Loves Farm and queried whether it would be beneficial for both the Council and residents for a risk assessment to be included as part of the Local Plan process.

1:30 The Panel was informed that the Wintringham development included a district centre with provision for a healthcare facility. Officers advised that the Planning Team had been working with NHS England and the developer to determine the appropriate timing for bringing the facility into operation. It was noted that a sufficient population threshold was required to make a health centre viable and that challenges had arisen in securing infrastructure delivery through Section 106 Agreements.

1:31 The Chair noted that the provision of primary healthcare infrastructure was estimated to require between £19 million and £25 million. Whilst acknowledging that interim facilities could be funded through Section 106 Agreements, the Chair queried how the remaining funding required for permanent healthcare provision would be secured.

1:32 The Panel was advised that developments are expected to mitigate the impacts arising from their own schemes. As such, a proportion of funding is sought through Section 106 Agreements, which typically provide capital contributions rather than revenue funding. Officers explained that additional funding requirements would then be pursued in partnership with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the NHS through other funding mechanisms.

1:33 In response to a question from Councillor Hassall, the Panel was advised that the delivery of water recycling centres would be phased in line with future investment periods and the associated funding and infrastructure delivery programmes. Members heard that the intention to fund these facilities was set out within the Statement of Common Ground with Anglian Water. It was also confirmed that there were other sites available within the Council's five-year housing land supply.

1:34 Councillor McIlwain advised that, in his capacity as Chair of the Local Plan Advisory Group, he had requested the production of an easy-to-read version of the Local Plan. He considered that this would assist councillors in understanding the document and improve transparency and accessibility for residents wishing to engage with the Plan.

1:35 In response to a question from Councillor Tobias regarding affordable military housing, the Panel was advised that the definition of affordable housing has evolved over time and now includes provisions relating to military housing. Members were informed that the Local Plan supports this policy approach. It was further explained that the policy is specifically worded to ensure that any such provision is supported by evidence of need demonstrated by the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

1:36 Councillor Tomlinson sought clarification on the evidence supporting the proposed level of growth in Little Paxton, noting that the proposal for Little Paxton 2 had increased from 220 homes to 410 . He commented that residents had previously

been consulted on much smaller-scale developments and questioned the basis for the scale of growth proposed.

1:37 The Panel was advised that the evidence supporting the proposed growth had been informed by additional work undertaken since earlier stages of the Local Plan process. This included the Stage 2 Water Cycle Study, the Infrastructure Delivery Study (Stage 2), and updated Strategic Transport Assessments, which had been used to assess the site's suitability and infrastructure requirements.

1:38 The Chair raised a query regarding sustainable drainage systems, wondering if this was as stated, non-statutory.

1:39 The Panel heard that their inclusion in the Policy lent greater weight in decision making.

1:40 Councillor Cawley sought clarification on the weighting that would be given to the sustainability and environmental elements of the Local Plan. He commented that some of the objectives appeared highly ambitious and expressed concern that reliance on biodiversity net gain could be difficult to quantify and measure in practice.

1:41 It was advised that an Inspector would not assign weight to the Plan but the Inspector would be testing the Plan and its policies against the supporting evidence provided.

1.42 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.