

**NEW HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN
CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) on the consultation and engagement process for the preparation of the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At its meeting on 8th December 2011, Cabinet formally confirmed the Council's intentions to roll forward the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy in the light of changing national and local circumstances, and endorsed the proposal to produce a new Local Plan in order to achieve this.

- 2.2 Since then, Cabinet has endorsed a suite of documents that underpin the process of preparing the new Local Plan, each of which was subject to public consultation, as follows:

- The Local Development Scheme (LDS) that outlines the timetable for preparing and delivering the new Local Plan, approved at Cabinet on 16th February 2012.
- The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) that outlines the ways in which the District Council will engage with stakeholders and the community on planning issues, approved by Cabinet on 19th April 2012.
- The Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (SA) that outlines the sustainability issues that need to be addressed by the new Local Plan, approved by Cabinet on 19th April 2012.

3. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

- 3.1 The new Local Plan preparation process will include a number of key stages, all of which include opportunities for consultation and engagement. The key stages in the process are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Key Stages in the new Local Plan consultation and engagement process	
Dates	Key Stages
Stage 1: 21 st May to 24 th June 2012	Initial Issues and Options Consultation: This was a non statutory initial introductory consultation designed to raise awareness of key issues and potential options focused on housing growth.

Stage 2: 27 th July to 28 th September 2012	Strategy and Policy Consultation: This is the first formal consultation which will seek views on a draft strategy, place-based policies, potential allocations, Development Management policies, and a draft Sustainability Appraisal.
Stage 3: January – February 2013	Initial draft Local Plan: The first full draft of the Local Plan will be published for consultation taking into account responses received during stage 2 and incorporating alternative sites and policies put forward where they contribute to the most sustainable option. This is a non-statutory stage seeking views on the content of the draft Local Plan.
Stage 4: June – July 2013	Proposed submission draft Local Plan: This is the formal publication of the Local Plan under Regulation 19 ¹ ; complemented with statutory consultation under Regulation 20 seeking representations concerned with the soundness of the Local Plan. Representations received at this stage are forwarded to the Planning Inspectorate for examination.
Stage 5: October – November 2013	Independent examination: Consideration by the Planning Inspectorate of the soundness of the Local Plan including, but not limited to, issues raised during the Regulation 20 consultation.
Stage 6: February – March 2014	Publication of recommendations of the Planning Inspector: Formal publication of the Inspector's recommendations for any amendments to the Local Plan.
Stage 7: May – June 2014	Adoption: Formal adoption of the Local Plan as the statutory development plan for Huntingdonshire superseding all current development plan documents.

- 3.2 Engagement with partners and local communities is critical to the preparation of the Local Plan. The initial issues and options consultation conducted in stage 1 was intended to raise the profile of the new Local Plan as well as to seek initial views on what the key issues might be and on some potential growth options.
- 3.3 A variety of forms of engagement will be used throughout the preparation of the Local Plan as appropriate to the nature of the stage. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 have no prescribed requirements for consultation until stage 4: proposed submission draft Local Plan; until then consultation is expected to be ongoing and appropriate.
- 3.4 To ensure the widest possible participation a combination of electronic, active engagement and published material is intended to be produced.
- 3.5 As required by Regulation 35 all material will be published on the Council's website. A database is maintained of some 5000 organisations and individuals who have expressed an interest in planning policy matters. Everyone registered

¹ Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

on this will be notified at each stage of the Local Plan preparation and invited to participate as appropriate.

- 3.6 Active engagement performs a useful role in facilitating discussion and responding to individual queries. In particular seminars are beneficial in engaging parish and town councils and will be offered throughout stages 1-4. Seminars will also be ongoing with key stakeholders such as neighbouring authorities, community and environmental organisations and infrastructure providers. To reach our wider communities exhibitions will be held across the district, particularly in areas of potential growth, giving people the opportunity to discuss their concerns on an individual basis.
- 3.7 A variety of published material will be provided at each stage of the Local Plan preparation. In accordance with Regulation 36 printed copies of all documents will be available on request but may be charged for as appropriate.
- 3.8 At the next stage of strategy and policy consultation a leaflet will be produced and delivered to all residential and commercial properties in Huntingdonshire to try to engage as wide a range of residents and businesses as possible at an early stage.
- 3.9 Local media, particularly the Hunts Post and News & Crier, will be engaged at each main stage of the Local Plan preparation to provide widespread cost-effective dissemination of proposals. Exhibitions or posters will be placed in libraries and information points providing headline information and signposting people to more detailed sources at stages 2-4 as appropriate.
- 3.10 Within the Council the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-being), Development Management Panel and Cabinet will be engaged at all stages of the Local Plan's preparation. The Development Plan Policy Advisory Group (DPPAG) will provide detailed advice on the draft content of the Local Plan and be actively engaged in its preparation.
- 3.11 A statutory 'duty to co-operate' on plan preparation issues was introduced by the Localism Act 2011. This reflects the requirement to co-operate, although not necessarily agree, with key stakeholders such as neighbouring authorities and infrastructure providers. Seminars and electronic communications will be used along with joint working on production of evidence material as appropriate.

4. INITIAL ISSUES AND OPTIONS CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Stage 1 of the consultation and engagement process (from 21st May to 24th June 2012) was a non-statutory consultation seeking views on initial issues and options for the new Local Plan. The consultation material included a concise document that summarised the key issues and focused on potential options for additional housing growth based on low, medium and high growth scenarios. These scenarios were based on official statistics from obtained from Cambridgeshire County Council and the Office of National Statistics.
- 4.2 As well as being widely publicised through the District Council's consultation portal, the process involved a series of briefings and seminars for 'Duty to Co-

operate' stakeholders, District Council Members, Parish and Town Councils, developers and environmental / community groups and newspaper articles and public notices in the Hunts Post and News & Crier.

- 4.3 A total of 110 written consultation responses have been received on this initial consultation and these will be reported to Cabinet on 19th July 2012. The key outcomes of these will be presented within the Strategy and Policy consultation and incorporated in the statement of consultation provided to the Planning Inspector at the examination stage. The consultation seminars held as part of this process are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Initial Issues and Options Consultation Seminars	
Date	Briefing Seminar
25 th April 2012	Statutory 'Duty to Co-operate' seminar on plan preparation process for key stakeholders, agencies, infrastructure providers and neighbouring authorities held at the HDC Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon
16 th May 2012	Member briefing on the plan preparation process and the Initial Issues and Options by the Head of Planning Services following Full Council held at the HDC Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon
21 st May 2012	Parish and Town Council Seminar hosted by the Strategic Planning and Housing Portfolio Holder and held at the Priory Centre, St Neots
22 nd May 2012	Parish and Town Council Seminar hosted by the Strategic Planning and Housing Portfolio Holder and held at the HDC Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon
23 rd May 2012	Parish and Town Council Seminar hosted by the Strategic Planning and Housing Portfolio Holder and held at the Abbey College, Ramsey
23 rd May 2012	Developers and Agents Seminar held at the HDC Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon
24 th May 2012	Environmental and Community Groups Seminar held at the HDC Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, Huntingdon

5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) notes the consultation and engagement process for the preparation of the new Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

Background Papers:

Cabinet Report and Minutes, 8 December 2011, 16 February 2012, 19 April 2012
Initial issues and Options consultation leaflet, May 2012

CONTACT OFFICER: Enquiries about this report to Steve Ingram, Head of Planning Services, on 01480 388400