

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036

Meeting/Date: Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Wellbeing) -
10th November 2015
Cabinet 19th November 2015

Executive Portfolio: Planning and Housing Strategy (DD)

Report by: Head of Development (AM)

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

This report outlines recent government announcements relating to a timescale for the production of Local Plans, provides an update on progress with preparing the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (HLP2036), identifies the supporting evidence that still needs to be completed, and (at paragraph 3.8 of the report) outlines the proposed way forward.

Recommendations:

That the Cabinet:

Notes –

- The government's new timescales for the plan preparation process.
- Progress on the preparation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

Endorses –

- The proposed way forward as outlined in paragraph 3.8 of the report.

Receives –

- Further quarterly update reports.

1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT / PURPOSE?

- 1.1 The preparation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (HLP2036) is a corporate priority. Recent government announcements have set a timescale for the production of Local Plans, and the purpose of this report is to make practical, pragmatic and positive recommendations on how those timescales should be met.
- 1.2 The government has announced that it expects new Local Plans “... to be written ...” by early 2017. The strong implication, because to date there has not been a full clarification, is that by the end of March 2017 Local Plans need to be at least at the second statutory stage of the Local Plan Examination process – known as the Submission stage. This is the point at which the Local Plan can be deemed to have been ‘written’ by the local planning authority, though it will still be subject to an Examination in Public by an independent Planning Inspector.
- 1.3 The next stage of the plan preparation process for the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (HLP2036) is the Proposed Submission stage which, following a 6 week public consultation period and consideration of comments received, will then be followed by the Submission stage.
- 1.4 It is clear that the government is serious in its intent to ensure that Local Plan coverage is maximised as soon as possible. The Prime Minister’s announcements in October 2015 reiterated and reinforced previous government announcements on the importance of Local Plans being in place to provide certainty for local communities on the locations for significant housing growth to support economic development.
- 1.5 A Written Statement on Local Plans made by Brandon Lewis (Minister of State for Housing and Planning) in July 2015 stated that the government will use sanctions if required to intervene where local planning authorities are not making sufficient progress in preparing new Local Plans, as follows:
- “As stated in the Productivity Plan we will publish league tables setting out local authorities’ progress on their Local Plans. In cases where no Local Plan has been produced by early 2017 – five years after the publication of the NPPF – we will intervene to arrange for the Plan to be written, in consultation with local people, to accelerate production of a Local Plan.”*
- 1.6 The imperative, then, is for local planning authorities to take practical and pragmatic steps to ensure that their Local Plan is delivered to the required stage by the deadline of March 2017.
- 1.7 The government’s timetable for producing Local Plans also offers some flexibility in the content and scope of the Local Plan. Local planning authorities are encouraged to make progress with Local Plans that meet the key criteria of the National Planning Policy Framework, but can commit to an early review of a consequently adopted Local Plan to enable, for example, further site allocations that contribute to meeting the objectively assessed needs for the area over a longer time period to be considered and tested through the plan-led process. To this effect, the Minister of State for Housing and Planning’s Written Statement also included the following paragraph:

“As we have made clear in planning guidance a commitment to an early review of a Local Plan may be appropriate as a way of ensuring that a

Local Plan is not unnecessarily delayed by seeking to resolve matters which are not critical to the plan's soundness or legal competence as a whole. The Planning Advisory Service has published a note on where Local Plans have been found sound, subject to early review, which local authorities should consider."

- 1.8 The government's view was further expressed by the Right Honourable Greg Clark MP (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) in a letter to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate in July 2015, which included the following paragraphs:

"Each local planning authority should produce a Local Plan for its area, and in doing so should proactively engage a wide section of the community so that Local Plans, as far as possible, reflect a collective vision for areas. The Government accords great importance to authorities getting up-to-date Local Plans in place and to supporting them in doing so as a priority."

"We have recently seen significant positive plan-making progress: 82% of authorities have now published Local Plans and 64% adopted Plans compared with 32% and 17% in May 2010 respectively. It is imperative that this positive progress is maintained, and the Government is open to taking further measures to achieve this if needed."

"As inevitably a plan cannot exactly account for future circumstances there is a real value in getting a Local Plan in place at the soonest opportunity, even if it has some shortcomings which are not critical to the whole plan. We have acknowledged this in planning guidance by setting out that Local Plans may be found sound conditional upon a review in whole or in part within five years of adoption."

- 1.9 The Planning Inspectorate's (PINS) own analysis of up to date Local Plans indicates that Huntingdonshire is in a good position, in that it is one of the 82% of authorities that have published Local Plans (PINS refers to the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy 2009 in this respect). In the absence of further clarity, it may well be that the adoption of the Core Strategy has already ensured that the District Council has produced a Local Plan by early 2017. However, in any event, the Core Strategy, along with the other components of the current Huntingdonshire Development Plan is not considered to be fully NPPF compliant and its replacement by the HLP2036 continues to be necessary.

- 1.10 The purpose of the report is to:

- Confirm the current position with the preparation of the HLP2036
- Identify the work necessary for making progress towards and through the formal stages of the Local Plan Examination process
- Recommend a way forward to meet the government's new requirement for Local Plans to be written by early 2017.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY / BACKGROUND

- 2.1 It is important to maintain progress with the preparation of the HLP2036 and, given the government's recent announcements, to follow a process that ensures that it is either within the formal process of being examined by an

independent Planning Inspector, or has been through this process and is adopted by March 2017. This report set out recommendations that will allow the HLP2036 plan preparation process to comply with the government's stated timescales.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED / ANALYSIS

Current position with the preparation of the HLP2036

3.1 The HLP2036 is being prepared in the format of a single Local Plan document, containing Huntingdonshire's planning strategy, development management policies and site allocations. When it is adopted, the HLP2036 will be the District Council's most up to date statement of planning policy and will form the statutory Development Plan for Huntingdonshire, along with any Neighbourhood Plans that are formally 'made' following a local referendum, and Cambridgeshire County Council's Minerals and Waste Core Strategy (2011) and Site Specific Proposals Plan (2012). It will be compliant with national planning policy, and it will replace the existing Huntingdonshire Development Plan Documents which are the Huntingdonshire Local Plan 1995, the Huntingdonshire Local Plan Alteration 2002, the Huntingdonshire Core Strategy (2009) and the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan (2011).

3.2 A series of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) have also been prepared over the years to complement and provide relevant detail on the current Development Plan policies. It is permissible under the current plan-making process to maintain a suite of SPDs to complement Local Plan policies, and there will need to be a process and programme for considering which SPDs should be deleted or updated, and whether new SPDs are required.

3.3 The current position with the HLP2036 is that it has been through all of its non-statutory stages, which have involved extensive consultation and engagement. These are as follows:

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|---------|---|----------------|
| Stage 1 | Issues and Options Consultation | May 2012 |
| Stage 2 | Draft Local Plan Consultation, including potential site development allocations | September 2012 |
| Stage 3 | Draft Local Plan Consultation, including detailed strategy, policies and site development allocations | May 2013 |
| Stage 4 | Targeted Draft Local Plan Consultation, a further iteration of Stage 3 targeted to key stakeholders | January 2015 |

3.4 The next stages in the process are the formal statutory stages, known as the Proposed Submission, Submission, Examination, and Adoption stages. The Examination stage is where the finalised and detailed HLP2036 and its supporting evidence base is tested by an independent Planning Inspector. If it is found to be 'sound' it can then be adopted as part of the Development Plan for Huntingdonshire.

Supporting Evidence that still needs to be completed for making progress towards and through the formal stages of the Local Plan Examination process

- 3.5 The key pieces of supporting evidence for the Local Plan that still need to be completed are the traffic modelling and an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA):
- Traffic modelling – Officers are liaising with CCC on the scope of this work and its delivery is dependent upon commitment from the County and District Councils; and
 - SFRA – The SFRA needs to be updated following receipt of the Environment Agency's new modelling, which was expected in August and is still awaited.
- 3.6 In addition, the following evidence needs to be refreshed to ensure that they are up-to-date/considered:
- An update to the retail study;
 - With the other Cambridge sub-region Strategic Housing Market Assessment authorities (plus Kings Lynn and West Norfolk and Peterborough) we are in the process of getting a new needs assessment for Gypsies and Travellers commissioned;
 - A refresh of our Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (Environmental Capacity Study) to ensure that it is as up to date and fully compliant with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance; and
 - A review of recent and proposed changes to planning policy (Fixing the Foundations, Affordable Housing Threshold court decision, Onshore Wind turbine developments policy changes, Housing and Planning Bill 2015 etc) that will impact on production or content of the Local Plan.
- 3.7 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to:
- “use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area, as far as is consistent with the policies set out in this Framework, including identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period;
 - identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements with an additional buffer of 5% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to ensure choice and competition in the market for land. Where there has been a record of persistent under delivery of housing, local planning authorities should increase the buffer to 20% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to provide a realistic prospect of achieving the planned supply and to ensure choice and competition in the market for land;
 - identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth, for years 6-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15; ...”
- 3.8 The NPPF requirement is to identify a supply of sites for years 1-10 and, where possible, for years 11-15. The District Council has been progressing the Local Plan with the intention of identifying a supply of specific, developable sites for years 1-15. The traffic modelling work still to be completed is in part

required to consider whether and how the proposed allocation at Wyton Airfield could be delivered. The NPPF states that “Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe”. It is still to be demonstrated that Wyton Airfield can be developed without “severe” residual cumulative transport impacts. It is therefore proposed that, alongside the evidence referred to in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6, the District Council explores the identification of a supply of sites for years 1-10 from the date of adoption only if it appears that identifying sites for years 11-15 will unduly delay the submission of the Local Plan. This will ensure that a new Local Plan is produced by early 2017 and, as the Government intends, the certainty that a Local Plan provides is not unduly delayed. A similar approach was recently taken, with the agreement of the independent Planning Inspector, by Dacorum Borough Council at the Examination of its Local Plan. The commitment to an early review of the Local Plan following its adoption, which is likely to be required if only sites for years 1-10 are identified, may also tie in with discussions about devolution, functional economic geography and potential shared planning/growth services.

4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

4.1 Comments from the Overview & Scrutiny (Environmental Well-being) Panel have been included separately on the Cabinet’s agenda at item 11, Comments from Overview and Scrutiny.

5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

5.1 The key risks in relation to housing delivery and the requirement to produce a Local Plan by early 2017 are outlined below, and can be best addressed by following the approach set out in this report:

- That the District Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites and that this results in developments that would not otherwise be approved having to be approved to provide a five-year supply of deliverable housing land; and
- That the District Council is deemed to not have met the requirement to produce a Local Plan by early 2017 and the Government intervenes to arrange for the Plan to be written.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

6.1 This production of the HLP2036 relates to the Corporate Priority of Enabling Sustainable Growth.

6.2 The objective under the Corporate Priority is as follows:

“To improve the supply of new and affordable housing to meet future needs: Our work programme includes, ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet objectively assessed needs and planning and delivering the provision of decent market and affordable housing for current and future needs.”

6.3 The relevant key actions for 2015/16 related to the objective are:

- Implement a programme to adopt the Local Plan to 2036
- Facilitate delivery of new housing on the large strategic sites at Alconbury, St Neots, Wyton, Bearscroft - Godmanchester

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Advice has been and will be sought as necessary throughout the preparation of the Local Plan.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The completion of the Supporting Evidence will require resources from the District Council and other duty to co-operate partners, including the County Council as Local Highway Authority. The Planning Policy budget includes budgets for Plan preparation and consultants to provide supporting evidence, but this will need to be kept under review as the scope of work required is clarified.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 9.1 To ensure that Members are updated in relation to recent government announcements relating to a timescale for the production of Local Plans, the progress with preparing the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (HLP2036) and the supporting evidence that still needs to be completed; and to seek endorsement of the proposed way forward to progress the preparation of the Plan.

- 9.2 That the Cabinet:

Notes –

- The government's new timescales for the plan preparation process.
- Progress on the preparation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036.

Endorses –

- The proposed way forward as outlined in paragraph 3.8 of the report.

Receives –

- Further quarterly update reports.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Local Plans: House of Commons: Written Statement Department for Communities and Local Government Written Statement made by Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis), July 2015

Letter from the Right Honourable Greg Clark MP (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, July 2015

Dacorum Borough Council's Local Plan (Inspector's report) 9 July 2013 (also referred to in Planning Advisory Service working note 'Early Reviews and Local Plans' undated)

Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 – Stage 3 May 2013 and Targeted Consultation January 2015

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