

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

<b>Title/Subject Matter:</b>	Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 Quarterly Update and Infrastructure Planning Update
<b>Meeting/Date:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny (Economy and Growth) – 14 June 2016 Cabinet – 16 June 2016
<b>Executive Portfolio:</b>	Planning Policy, Housing & Infrastructure
<b>Report by:</b>	Head of Development
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	All

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**Executive Summary:**

This is the third quarterly update on progress on the Local Plan to 2036, as agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2015. It provides confirmation that the Core Strategy (2009) meets the government's requirement to have a submission local plan by March 2017 but expeditious preparation of a post-National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Local Plan is required. The report provides updates on each element of the evidence base currently under preparation and highlights the risks arising from delays to the Strategic Transport Study and the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment. A December 2015 report to the Cabinet provided an Infrastructure Planning Update and this report also provides a further update in relation to highways and transport infrastructure projects.

**Recommendations:**

That the Cabinet:

- 1) Notes progress on preparation of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 and its supporting evidence base, including confirmation that the Core Strategy (2009) meets the Government's requirement to have a submission Local Plan by March 2017, and the update in relation to highways and transport infrastructure projects; and
- 2) Endorses the use of approach b in paragraph 4.3 (the revalidated Cambridge Sub-Regional Model for the Strategic Transport Study).

## **1. PURPOSE of the report**

1.1 This report provides an update on progress on preparation of the proposed submission Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (HLP2036) and its supporting evidence base in the light of Government announcements relating to the timescale for the production of Local Plans, and to provide a further update on highways and transport infrastructure projects.

1.2 The main purpose of the report is to:

- Confirm the timelines required for delivery of the proposed submission Local Plan in response to confirmation of national deadlines.
- Confirm the delivery programme for the evidence base necessary to deliver the HLP2036.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

2.1 At the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2015 it was resolved that quarterly reports on progress with preparation of the HLP2036 should be provided. The December 2015 report on Infrastructure Planning also stated that a further update would be provided in June 2016.

## **3. NATIONAL TIMESCALES FOR UPDATING LOCAL PLANS**

3.1 'Fixing the Foundations' (July 2015) set out the Government's intention to publish league tables of local planning authorities' progress in plan-making. The first data records for Huntingdonshire provide confirmation that the Core Strategy (2009) meets the requirement from the Written Ministerial Statement on Local Plans (July 2015) to have a development plan prepared post-2004. The deadline for 'writing' a Local Plan by March 2017 does not therefore apply to this district. However, as the Core Strategy pre-dates the introduction of the NPPF in 2012 a later deadline of March 2018 for review of the development plan is advocated by the Local Plans Expert Group report upon which Government consultation closed on 27 April 2016.

## **4. PROGRESS WITH PREPARATION OF THE HLP2036 AND ITS SUPPORTING EVIDENCE BASE**

### **Strategic Transport Study**

4.1 Mott McDonald has been appointed to conduct the Strategic Transport Study on behalf of Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) and Cambridgeshire County Council. This is a fundamental element of the evidence base necessary to demonstrate that the preferred development strategy is deliverable. It will test the transport implications of four possible development scenarios (which were set out in the report to the March meetings), along with the necessary baseline assessment advocated by National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). It will investigate the mitigation packages that would be required to facilitate each scenario and provide indicative costings for them.

4.2 The Strategic Transport Study brief was prepared on the basis that the revalidation of the Cambridge Sub-Regional Model (CSRM) traffic model by consultants for the County Council would be completed in May 2016, as the County Council had confirmed earlier this year. This revalidation is essential to ensure modelling is based on an up-to-date data set and can provide forecasts to 2036. However, the County Council advise that this revalidation work is now

not expected to be completed until the end of June 2016 and will then need further checking to test accuracy.

4.3 Mott McDonald have discussed the modelling options with Atkins (the County Council's consultants) who manage the CSRM on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council and identified two possible approaches:

- a) *Priority is to complete the proposed submission Local Plan by December 2016*: this would necessitate use of the old CSRM model which is available now but only forecasts to 2031, it would be open to challenge by developers on the basis that dated information has been used and incurs the major risk that at the Local Plan Examination the Inspector may ask for the development scenarios to be retested through the revalidated CSRM as that will be well established by that time. This could result in a suspension of the Examination of around six months and an additional cost of over £100,000 to re-run the modelling and complete the analysis of its outputs.
- b) *Priority is to develop a defensible transport evidence base*: this would involve waiting for the revalidated CSRM to be available which could provide forecasts up to 2041 if required and would be based on an up-to-date data set. This would form a more robust evidence base for the Local Plan Examination and be less susceptible to challenge from developers. Preliminary work could be undertaken in the short-term but this approach would necessitate delaying modelling the four development scenarios until the revalidation work on the CSRM is completed; checking to test accuracy for the Huntingdonshire area could be incorporated within the scope of the Strategic Transport Study.

4.4 Mott McDonald has been asked to prepare a revised timetable for the Strategic Transport Study based on approach b) using the revalidated CSRM as this is expected to be the lower risk and potentially lower cost option in the longer term. This will have implications for completion of the HLP2036 resulting in several months delay as the development strategy cannot be finalised until the transport evidence demonstrates it is deliverable when accompanied by an appropriate transport mitigation package.

#### **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)**

4.5 JBA are continuing to progress the SFRA as far as possible with the information released by the Environment Agency. However, two main sources of delay persist. Firstly, the Environment Agency has still not completed the Lower Great Ouse flood model. This is necessary to produce updated flood risk zones without which more detailed assessment of sites in zones at greater risk of flooding cannot be undertaken. Secondly, the Environment Agency issued updated guidance in February on consideration of climate change allowances to support the NPPF. The Environment Agency has confirmed that their modelling on revised climate change allowances in September will not include the Lower Great Ouse as funding limitations are restricting their work to areas at greatest risk. Discussions are ongoing between the Council, JBA and the Environment Agency to identify alternative approaches. These may include funding additional modelling, using generalised flow modelling or using flood zone 2 as a proxy measure for climate change allowances. Any solution will need to be agreed with the Environment Agency to prevent the risk of objection at the Local Plan examination. Until this agreement has been reached very little further progress can be made on the SFRA resulting in delay to the programme and preventing finalisation of site allocations for the HLP2036.

## **Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment**

- 4.6 A replacement Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTANA) is being coordinated by the Joint Strategic Planning Unit on behalf of Huntingdonshire District Council in partnership with 7 neighbouring authorities. All survey and direct engagement work has been completed and is now being analysed. Legal opinion has been sought from the QC retained by South Cambridgeshire District Council for their Local Plan examination on the implications of the new definition of Gypsies and Travellers as set out in the August 2015 Planning Policy for Traveller Sites. This, along with the need to obtain more detailed information from some partner authorities has led to delay in completing the report from May until early July.

## **Retail and Commercial Leisure Needs Assessment**

- 4.7 Nexus Planning was appointed in April 2016 to undertake a Retail and Commercial Leisure Needs Assessment. This includes a survey of 1,000 householders to ascertain current shopping and leisure behaviour patterns including use of internet and 'click and collect' services to help shape future policies for town centre uses. Engagement with local stakeholders such as town councils, Huntingdon BID, St Ives town team as well as neighbouring authorities is scheduled for June. The Assessment will advise on the need for additional retail and commercial leisure floorspace to ascertain the quantity and nature of site allocations for the HLP2036 and to inform development management policies.

## **Objectively Assessed Need Update**

- 4.8 To meet NPPF and NPPG requirements to take into account market signals and updated household projections, an update of the Objectively Assessed Need figure for Huntingdonshire has been commissioned from Cambridgeshire County Council's Research Group. This is necessary to ensure the housing delivery target for the HLP2036 is up-to-date. It will complement the more detailed information contained within the Cambridge sub-region strategic housing market assessment (2013). It will also analyse and address overlaps with neighbouring housing market areas, including in particular Bedford and Peterborough Housing Market Areas, and consider the jobs/population/housing impacts of proposed MoD base closures at RAF Alconbury and RAF Molesworth.

## **Wind Energy Development**

- 4.9 A consultation document is being prepared in response to the Written Ministerial Statement of 18 June 2015 which required suitable areas for wind turbines to be clearly allocated in a local or neighbourhood plan. The draft document will need to identify whether any general areas within Huntingdonshire are potentially suitable for wind energy development; it will set out a range of options and specify a preferred approach. It will not consider individual sites. Subject to discussions with the Member Development Plan Policy Advisory Group, consultation is expected in the summer. The outcomes of the consultation will inform preparation of the HLP2036.

## 5. HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS UPDATE

- 5.1 **A14 trunk road:** the Development Consent Order (DCO) was approved by the Secretary of State for Transport on 11 May 2016. Works are due to commence by late 2016 and Highways England programmes the completion of the new route by the end of 2019. The removal of the Huntingdon viaduct will then commence and the new road network within the town centre should be completed 18 months later. HDC is currently involved in final design elements, including environment, delivery, legacy and noise & air quality and remains a key stakeholder in the overall delivery of the scheme.
- 5.2 **A428: Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet Improvement.** This is one of 13 new schemes in the East of England due to start construction by 2020 and, if approved, will be constructed to Department for Transport 'Expressway' standard i.e. min. 2-lane dual carriageway. Highways England are now developing route options and are currently setting-up Stakeholder Forums with all tiers of local government, this Council being a Tier 1 Stakeholder. Public engagement on scheme will take place during Spring 2017 with a Ministerial announcement of a 'Preferred Route' due after that. Subject to a DCO submission and approval by Government, works are currently planned to commence during Spring 2020. This scheme also links to the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway scheme, see below.
- 5.3 **A1: Oxford to Cambridge Expressway and East West Rail:** This continues to follow the same process as the A1 and is the second of the six Strategic Studies across England. Again, recommendations will come forward at the end of 2016 and the Council continues to act as a key stakeholder in assisting to develop emerging ideas. Currently at the ideas and options stage, work is ongoing with DfT and HE and any emerging options will take account of the earlier delivery of the Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet proposals, as above. Any scheme will also tie into any emerging proposals arising from the A1 Study, as well as the East West rail scheme, where Network Rail has recently announced that the Bedford/Sandy/Cambridge element will form the route of the 'Central Section' of the scheme following the consideration of 20 options that were considered in detail.
- 5.4 **Rail investment:** Network Rail (NR) continue to develop the East Coast Main Line (ECML) route study in order to identify the constraints to growth between London, Newcastle and Scotland. HDC is a key stakeholder and is working with NR and partners to develop and publish a strategic study for the long-term development of the route, including measures that benefit Huntingdonshire. Current options include a greater spread of long-distance stopping patterns in order to reduce congestion at key stations, such as Peterborough, and the possibility of hourly long-distance services from Grimsby and Lincoln stopping at Huntingdon and/or St. Neots. The Thameslink programme is on target for 2018/19 to deliver services from Huntingdon and St. Neots, through Kings Cross St. Pancras, to a range of destinations south of London. New rolling-stock on Great Northern services is due prior to the formal launch of Thameslink.
- 5.5 An early scheme arising from the ECML Study is the reinstatement of 7 miles of 4<sup>th</sup> track (Up Slow to London) between Huntingdon and the 4<sup>th</sup> track 'loop' at Woodwalton. This will provide additional capacity for Great Northern services by creating a line speed of 100/mph and freeing-up capacity for long-distance high speed services and will also include reconfigured design of overhead line arrangements to provide independent wiring thereby reducing incidents of complete line closure. Environmental surveys have commenced with Public

Information Events taking place during Summer 2016. Subject to design approval, works will commence in mid-2018 and finish by December 2019.

## 6. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS

- 6.1 Continuing delays in availability of the revalidated CSRM means that a robust Strategic Transport Study cannot be completed by the date necessary to deliver the HLP2036 to the timeline anticipated in the Local Development Scheme (LDS). However, the risk of using the outdated version of the model is significant in the long term as the evidence base will be less robust and there is a significant likelihood that the Local Plan Examination Inspector will ask for the transport modelling to be re-run incurring additional cost and a greater overall delay than waiting for the revalidated model to be available.
- 6.2 Difficulties in obtaining information from the Environment Agency that is necessary to complete the SFRA will also impact on the timeline for preparation of the HLP2036 as suitability and deliverability of site specific allocations cannot be confirmed. Additional costs may be incurred depending on the alternative approach necessary to ensure a robust SFRA is produced that can be supported through the Local Plan Examination by the Environment Agency.
- 6.3 These delays from consultees are extremely frustrating as the District Council is committed to producing the certainty for all that a new adopted Local Plan will provide. The Head of Development and the Executive Councillor for Planning Policy, Housing & Infrastructure will be seeking early meetings with these consultees to complain about and re-emphasise the importance of timely inputs and meeting timescales. Confirmation received since the last quarterly report and the approval of the LDS does however mean that the adoption of the Core Strategy has already ensured that the Council has met the Government requirement deadline for 'writing' a Local Plan by March 2017.
- 6.4 The table below is extracted from the Local Development Scheme approved by the Cabinet on 17 March 2016 and amended to show the currently anticipated – the exact delay in the availability of the CSRM is still being clarified – implications for the timetable for preparation of the HLP2036.

Timetable: Key stages- completed	
Sustainability appraisal scoping report	February – March 2012
Issues and options consultation	May – June 2012
Strategy and Policy consultation	August – November 2012
Full draft Local Plan (stage 3) consultation	May – July 2013
Additional sites consultation	November – December 2013
(Long Term Transport Strategy preparation led by Cambridgeshire County Council)	May – November 2014
Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2026: Targeted Consultation 2015	January – March 2015

Timetable: key stage – to be completed/undertaken	
Finalisation of evidence base – including Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment, Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment	August 2015 - <del>September 2016</del> <b>November 2016</b>
Strategic Transport Study in collaboration with Cambridgeshire County Council	January 2016 - <del>August 2016</del> <b>December 2016</b>
Statutory consultation on proposed submission Local	<del>January – February</del>

Plan to 2036 (Reg. 19)	2017 May – June 2017
Submission to Secretary of State	July 2017 November 2017
Estimated examination	July 2017 – December 2018 November 2017 – April 2019
Receipt of Inspector's report	January May 2019
Estimated date for adoption	February June 2019

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

7.1 The production of the HLP2036 relates to the 2016/17 strategic priority of Delivering Sustainable Growth.

7.2 The objective under the strategic priority is as follows:  
*“To improve the supply of new and affordable housing, jobs and community facilities to meet future need.”*

*Our work programme includes:*

- *“ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet objectively assessed needs;*
- *planning and delivering the provision of decent market and affordable housing for current and future needs;*
- *ensuring that there are the right community facilities to accommodate the housing growth.”*

7.3 The relevant key actions for 2016/17 are:

- prepare the Local Plan;
- facilitate delivery of new housing on the large strategic sites at:
  - St Neots
  - Wyton
  - Alconbury Weald
- maintain a 5 year housing supply position

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 A single Planning Policy earmarked reserve was agreed at the Cabinet meeting of 17 March 2016 enabling money to be drawn down to support production of the evidence base. It is expected that any additional funding required for the SFRA can be drawn from this.

## 9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

9.1 To inform Members about Huntingdonshire's compliance with national guidance on the timing of submission of replacement local plans. To update Members in relation to highways and transport infrastructure projects. To update Members on preparation of the HLP2036 and its associated evidence base and seek endorsement of the proposed approach to await the revalidated CSRM for the Strategic Transport Study with the acknowledgement that this will mean that the timetable set out in the Local Development Scheme cannot be met.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

[Cabinet Report 17 March 2016 Item 3](#)

[HM Treasury July 2015 Fixing the Foundations](#)

[Written Ministerial Statement July 2015 Local Plans](#)

[Environment Agency February 2016 Climate change allowance guidance](#)

[Written Ministerial Statement 18 June 2015 on Wind Turbine Development](#)

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