



# LOCAL PLAN

## Issues Engagement Paper

April 2023

## Contents

Document Information	1		
<b>1</b> Introduction	2	<b>5</b> Supporting our places	37
Purpose of consultation	2	<b>Issue: Huntingdonshire's market towns</b>	38
How to engage in the consultation	2	Huntingdon	39
Preparing a local plan	3	St Neots	41
National context	5	St Ives	43
Regional context	6	Ramsey	46
Cambridgeshire context	7	<b>Issue: Huntingdonshire's villages</b>	48
Local context	8	<b>Issue: The countryside</b>	50
Potential plan period	11	<b>Issue: Historic environment</b>	52
<b>2</b> Creating a vision and objectives	12	<b>6</b> Meeting the housing needs of all	54
<b>3</b> Responding to the climate crisis	13	<b>Issue: The need for new homes</b>	54
<b>Issue: Carbon emissions and targets</b>	14	<b>Issue: Delivery of new homes</b>	56
<b>Issue: Carbon sequestration and offsetting</b>	16	<b>Issue: Housing mix</b>	57
<b>Issue: Renewable and low carbon energy</b>	18	<b>Issue: Housing tenures</b>	59
<b>Issue: Energy efficiency and retrofitting</b>	20	<b>Issue: Housing standards</b>	63
<b>Issue: Flooding, water supplies and water pollution</b>	22	<b>Issue: Gypsy, Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Boat-dwellers accommodation</b>	65
<b>Issue: Waste and recycling</b>	26	<b>7</b> Promoting a prosperous local economy	66
<b>4</b> Protecting and enhancing the natural environment	28	<b>Issue: A green economy</b>	67
<b>Issue: Huntingdonshire's landscapes</b>	28	<b>Issue: Supporting and diversifying the local economy</b>	69
<b>Issue: The natural environment and nature conservation designations</b>	30	<b>Issue: Logistics and distribution</b>	73
<b>Issue: Green infrastructure</b>	32	<b>Issue: Rural economy and agriculture</b>	75
<b>Issue: Biodiversity net gain</b>	34	<b>Issue: Retail and adapting our town centres</b>	78
<b>Issue: Air quality</b>	35	<b>Issue: Enhancing tourism</b>	80

## Contents

<b>8</b>	Developing high quality sustainable communities with supporting infrastructure	<b>83</b>
	<b>Issue: Design of buildings and places</b>	<b>84</b>
	<b>Issue: Open space in new development</b>	<b>87</b>
	<b>Issue: Travel and transport</b>	<b>88</b>
	<b>Issue: Public transport and active travel infrastructure</b>	<b>91</b>
	<b>Issue: Parking provision</b>	<b>93</b>
	<b>Issue: Community facilities and services</b>	<b>94</b>
	<b>Issue: Utilities and digital infrastructure</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>9</b>	Distributing new growth	<b>98</b>
	<b>Issue: What factors should we take into account?</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>10</b>	Next steps	<b>102</b>
<b>11</b>	Glossary	<b>103</b>



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Document Information

**Title:** Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper

**Status:** Consultation paper to find out what local residents, communities, businesses and organisations think the priorities are for improving the district for future generations and how to reduce the impacts of the climate emergency on the local area. Responses will inform Huntingdonshire District Council's Local Plan Review.

**Date of approval for consultation:** Overview and Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel, 5 April 2023. Cabinet, 18 April 2023.

**Document availability:** The Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper can be found on the Council's [consultation portal](#). Copies can be downloaded from the portal and responses to the consultation may be entered directly into the portal. A hard copy can be viewed at Customer Services Reception, Huntingdonshire District Council, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon. This office is open from 8:45 to 17:00 Mondays to Thursdays and 8:45 to 16:30 on Fridays.

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# Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

## 1 Introduction

### Purpose of consultation

- 1.1** This Issues Engagement Paper is a fundamental step in starting to prepare a new Local Plan for Huntingdonshire. It seeks to find out what local residents, communities, businesses and organisations think the priorities are for improving the district for future generations and how to reduce the impacts of the climate crisis and ecological emergency on the local area.
- 1.2** This paper looks only at issues that will need to be thought about when preparing the next Local Plan; it does not set out any form of draft policies or options for them yet. All the responses made will be thoroughly considered and will be used to shape the next, more detailed phase of engagement on further issues and options for the approaches that might be taken in the future, developing the Local Plan's approaches to guiding development.
- 1.3** It is intended to be a discursive paper to provoke thought, comment and opinions. It is shaped by exploration of the issues faced by the district as identified through the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. While it seeks to bring forward discussion on a wide range of issues, it is not intended to prejudge the outcomes of any of them. It is anticipated that further issues are likely to be identified through responses to this paper and it is proposed that further engagement will be held on these in the future.

### How to engage in the consultation

- 1.4** This Issues Paper seeks your honest opinions. A number of questions are asked throughout this document, these can be found in the yellow boxes. You can choose to respond to all the questions or just those of particular interest to you.

- 1.5** It would be helpful if you could complete the questions using our online [Consultation Portal](#). A one-off registration process is needed to start this and instructions on how to register can be found in the Frequently Asked Questions section at the front of the [Consultation Portal](#). It is possible to save draft versions of your responses and finish and submit them later if you choose to. By visiting the [Consultation Portal](#) you can give permission for us to keep you up-to-date with later stages of the Local Plan and we can assess your comments more efficiently.
- 1.6** If you would prefer to submit your response in writing please ensure you make it clear which question(s) you are answering. Your responses must include your name and email or full postal address otherwise they cannot be registered. You can send responses by email to [local.plan@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:local.plan@huntingdonshire.gov.uk), or by post to:
- Planning Policy, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN
- 1.7** Please note all responses will be published on our [Consultation Portal](#). This will include your name and organisation (if any) but will not include any contact details. You can change the frequency with which you receive emails, or opt out altogether, if you wish to on our [Consultation Portal](#).

**Please be sure to respond between 26 April and 5 July 2023 (10 weeks).**

- 1.8** A Call for Sites is also still open until 7 June 2023, this is aimed at landowners, developers and planning agents, other organisations and interest groups who are invited to submit suitable sites which are available in the short to medium term for development, or to identify land of particular value e.g. biodiversity enhancement. You can submit a site using by completing the Call for Sites form [here](#) and are strongly encouraged to

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

submit details of your site at this stage of the new Local Plan's preparation to assist with preparation of the most sustainable development strategy for the coming years.

### Preparing a local plan

- 1.9** A Local Plan is the key document that guides new development within the district. The government requires all local councils to prepare a Local Plan to give a long term strategy which sets out a vision for their area supported by planning policies and proposals to help deliver that. It is shaped by understanding the development needs of the area and their social, environmental and economic context. A Local Plan shows what sort of development is acceptable where, to ensure the identified needs for housing, businesses, infrastructure and open spaces are met. It also contains policies to safeguard the environment, to enable climate change adaptation and mitigation, and to promote high quality design that supports and creates attractive places that work well for the communities that use them.
- 1.10** Community engagement is a crucial element of Local Plan preparation. The Local Plan update will be shaped by the views of local communities, individuals, businesses, infrastructure providers and interested organisations along with landowners and developers.
- 1.11** The processes for preparing a Local Plan are set out in the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#). They encourage extensive early participation through opportunities such as this Issues Engagement Paper. At least four major stages of public engagement are anticipated during its preparation with political scrutiny of it throughout by locally elected District Councillors. Timings may be influenced through the need for extra research and evidence on particular issues, or changes to the planning system through the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill. Once the Council believes that a sustainable and deliverable plan has been prepared it will be submitted for examination by an independent Planning Inspector.

### Anticipated preparation stages for the Local Plan



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**1.12** The Local Plan is supported by many other documents which provide technical evidence or inform its preparation. Currently, three of these are already prepared:

- The **Local Development Scheme** sets out the scope of the Local Plan update, the proposed programme for production of the Local Plan and identifies a range of potential risks and mitigation approaches that may be taken if needed. It will be monitored annually and kept up to date to reflect any changes to the anticipated timetable.
- The **Statement of Community Involvement** explains how the Council will engage with local residents, communities, businesses and interested organisations on planning matters; it is expected to be updated at least every five years.
- The **Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report** identifies a range of international, national and local plans and programmes that may influence the Local Plan along with any targets they set that the Local Plan should help achieve such as the reduction of carbon emissions. It provides baseline information about Huntingdonshire which is explored in more detail in this Engagement Paper and has also been used to inform the development of sustainability objectives against which to test the Local Plan.

**1.13** A series of other supporting documents will be produced as preparation of the Local Plan progresses:

- **Sustainability Appraisal** will assess the likely economic, social and environmental effects of the Local Plan through objectives developed in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. It will help judge the relative advantages of different options and alternative approaches at each stage of plan production to assist in deciding which will deliver the best outcomes for the district. The requirement to produce a Sustainability Appraisal is set in European legislation, transposed into UK law. It may be subject to change through the government's proposed planning reforms which suggests its replacement by a simpler assessment approach.

- **Habitats Regulations Assessment** (also known as Appropriate Assessment) considers the impacts of the Local Plan on European designated nature conservation sites including Ramsar sites, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. Huntingdonshire benefits from a good number of these with some designations overlapping. Consideration must also be paid to sites in neighbouring areas which may be affected for instance by downstream impacts on the water environment.
- The **Statement of Consultation** provides a record of how consultation has been carried out on the Local Plan and how it has evolved as a result of the responses received. This is an iterative document which is supplemented at each stage with new analysis of responses received and changes made to the draft Local Plan.
- **Equalities Impact Assessment** is a process required by the Equalities Act 2010 to assist with eliminating unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations amongst all members of the community whether they share a protected characteristic or not. It aims to demonstrate the Council's compliance with the Public Sector Equalities Duty.

**1.14** Up to date evidence is essential to support preparation of a Local Plan. It is required to be able to establish and justify the future needs for housing, employment, commercial and community uses, transport and travel requirements and the potential environmental impacts of possible developments and policies. Evidence is also needed to demonstrate the importance of constraints such as flood risk, heritage and places of high nature conservation value. Some are required by national guidance, others are specific to particular local challenges; it could include nationally available data, technical reports or locally produced studies. Timing of these documents may vary, with some being needed later to test the deliverability of proposed policies, helping the Local Plan positively plan for the future. The full range of evidence documents cannot be predetermined as it will also need to be responsive to issues that arise during preparation of the Local Plan. A small number of relevant documents have already been published or are in progress including:

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- Huntingdonshire Futures (2023)
- Huntingdonshire Climate Strategy (2023)
- Ready to Recover: Economic Growth Plan 2020-2025
- Huntingdonshire Economic Growth Plan 2020-2025
- St Neots Masterplan (2019)
- Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey Masterplans (2023)
- Housing Needs of Specific Groups (2021)
- Huntingdonshire Housing Strategy 2020-2025
- Transport Strategy: Huntingdonshire, by Cambridgeshire County Council, in progress
- Active Travel Strategy, by Cambridgeshire County council, in progress
- Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, in progress
- A141 and St Ives Transport Study, by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, in progress
- Leisure Built Facilities Strategy, in progress
- Outdoor Sports Facilities strategy, in progress
- Landscape and Townscape Supplementary Planning Document (2022)

### 1.15 The following evidence documents are already anticipated:

- Integrated Water Cycle Studies and Strategic Flood Risk Assessments
- Town Centres and Retail Needs Assessment
- Gypsy, Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment
- Land Availability Assessment(s), including housing, employment and open space uses
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Local Plan Viability Assessment
- Transport Baseline and Assessment

## National context

- 1.16** The national context for local plans is set in formal legislation which can be explored in detail on the national [Planning Portal](#). The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied. Detailed guidance supporting the NPPF is provided in an online format only as the [National Planning Practice Guidance](#). The NPPF refers to the development plan as a collective name covering all locally prepared spatial plans; for Huntingdonshire this includes the local plan, neighbourhood plans and minerals and waste local plans.

### Primacy of the Development Plan

- Section 38(6) of The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- The National Planning Policy Framework must be taken into account in preparing the development plan, and is a material consideration in planning decisions. Planning policies and decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements. (NPPF, paragraph 2)

- 1.17** A particular aspect of the NPPF, illustrated in the box below, has significant implications for decision-making on planning applications for development proposals which include new housing and can strongly affect local communities.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Five Year Housing Land Supply

Local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old.... (NPPF, paragraph 74)

For decision-taking this means:

- c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
- d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
  - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
  - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole. (NPPF, paragraph 11)

- 1.18** Lack of a five year housing land supply to meet the above requirement and consequent application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in NPPF paragraph 11 d is commonly known as 'engaging the tilted balance'. This means that the threshold is raised significantly higher for demonstrating that a proposed housing scheme will cause sufficient harm compared to its benefits to justify refusing a planning application.
- 1.19** Beyond planning specific legislation and policies, the government has published a series of strategies that will also influence the preparation of the new Local Plan, many refer to the role and importance of the planning

system in promoting sustainable development and combatting climate change. The landmark [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#) (BEIS, 2021) sets out how the UK will deliver on its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and outlines measures to transition to a green and sustainable future. [A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment](#) sets out a long term approach to protecting and enhancing the UK's natural landscapes and habitats. The [Environment Act 2021](#) aims to improve air and water quality, tackle waste, improve biodiversity and make other environmental improvements and facilitates new regulations and processes for setting long term improvement targets. [Mission Zero Independent Review of Net Zero](#) (BEIS and DESNZ, January 2023) includes a recommendation to reform the planning system at local and national level to place net zero at its heart.

- 1.20** Planning is expected to change in response to reforms proposed in the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) introduced to Parliament in May 2022. The Bill places significant emphasis on enhancing design and promoting digital access to planning information; it also suggests the introduction of national development management policies covering issues which apply in most areas to avoid the need to include them in Local Plans. A consultation on a [revised NPPF](#) commenced on 22 December 2022 and closed on 2 March 2023 seeking views on proposed changes to the NPPF.
- 1.21** The Bill has a long way to go through the legislative process yet and its future shape cannot be predetermined. However, in May 2022 Housing Minister Stuart Andrew advised local planning authorities to 'carry on because that work is valuable work anyway'; therefore, work and public engagement carried out towards preparation of this new Local Plan will be used and adapted should the legal processes change before it is completed.

### Regional context

- 1.22** The Oxford-Cambridge Arc (the Arc) comprises Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire. The area is home to approximately 3.7 million residents and supports over 2 million jobs.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

In 2021 the government consulted on a [draft Spatial Framework](#) for the Arc to 2050 which looked to shape local planning and investment decisions under four 'pillars': the environment; the economy; connectivity and infrastructure; and place-making. Following the creation of the 'Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) in September 2021, the priorities for the the Ox-Cam Arc shifted.

**1.23** In December 2021 Huntingdonshire District Council adopted the [Shared regional principles for protecting, restoring and enhancing the environment in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc](#) to target net-zero carbon at a district level by 2040. These are:

- to protect, enhance and restore existing nature areas (green spaces) and create new ones (where it is viable to do so)
- to pursue the ambitions of 'A Green Future: Our 25-year Plan to Improve the Environment' and that new development should be designed with a view to minimising and mitigating the effects of climate change
- to ensure existing and new communities see real benefits in their well-being from living in Huntingdonshire
- to use natural resources wisely.

**1.24** January 2023 saw the Secretary of State Michael Gove confirm support for the establishment of an Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership to replace the Arc. The Partnership's initial programme is to: develop a set of propositions to attract international investment and profile the region on a global stage; and to continue the work underway to embed shared Environment Principles. The Council will continue to engage with the the Partnership and track its progress to understand how this will shape future priorities for the district.

### Cambridgeshire context

**1.25** In March 2017 the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) was established as a Mayoral Combined Authority covering the whole of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area which includes Huntingdonshire. The CPCA is the Local Transport Authority for the area and in this capacity has a strong role to play in promoting the delivery of transport infrastructure to meet the needs of existing and future residents and businesses. Coordinated through the [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#) the CPCA is involved in promoting road and rail improvements, high quality bus networks and active travel opportunities along with promoting digital connectivity to reduce the need for physical travel and enhance access options for many residents. The CPCA play a major role in shaping transport infrastructure and service provision and in promoting enhancements to active travel opportunities. As of February 2023 work is ongoing on preparation of a [Bus Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#).

**1.26** The CPCA also contribute to delivery of planning permissions through provision of substantial funding towards construction of affordable housing. A key goal is to drive economic growth across the area by helping to overcome barriers to growth, provision of support to businesses and investment in improving skills amongst local people that align with the needs of local businesses.

**1.27** Cambridgeshire County Council is responsible for preparing the [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan](#). The County Council also hold responsibility for local highway planning and maintenance, cycleways, footpaths and public rights of way. They play a key role in considering the accessibility of potential sites that may be identified for development through the new Local Plan and in considering the suitability of proposed transport and travel related improvements put forward as part of planning applications. The County Council is also responsible for a wide range of social and environmental services which feed into successful communities such as education, libraries and heritage. The

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

County Council play a strong part in promoting active travel infrastructure and initiatives to encourage walking, cycling, scooting and other non-motorised forms of travel. Both their [Active Travel Strategy](#) and their [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#) are intended to help deliver sustainable travel options to support existing communities and new developments within Huntingdonshire.

### Local context

**1.28** The District Council administers much of the planning system affecting Huntingdonshire's built and natural environments. The Council is responsible for preparing Local Plans, determining planning applications and carrying out enforcement against unauthorised development. Town and Parish Councils can also influence planning decisions by choosing to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. Within Huntingdonshire planning is guided by a suite of documents known collectively as the development plan. As at February 2023 this comprises:

- [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#)
- [Buckden Neighbourhood Development Plan 2020-2036](#)
- [Bury Village Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036](#)
- [Godmanchester Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2036](#)
- [Grafham and Ellington Neighbourhood Plan 2020-2036](#)
- [Houghton and Wyton Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2036](#)
- [Huntingdon Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2026](#)
- [St Neots Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2029](#)
- [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan 2036](#)

**1.29** The Development Plan is accompanied by an [interactive policies map](#).

**1.30** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) was adopted on 15th May 2019 . As set out above, the national context has changed since then and national guidelines require reviewing it every five years. Existing Neighbourhood Plans remain valid in shaping decision making on planning applications. Updates may be advantageous once the updated Local Plan is adopted

should there be any conflict in strategic policy approaches as the most recently adopted plan takes precedence in decision making. In terms of scope the new Local Plan will cover the whole of Huntingdonshire.

### Corporate Plan

**1.31** Our current Corporate Plan sets out the Council's objectives and key actions and performance measures for the period 2023 to 2026. The Corporate Plan identifies objectives relating to:

- Improving quality of life for local people
- Creating a better Huntingdonshire for future generations
- Delivering good quality, high value for money services with good control and compliance with statutory obligations

**1.32** The Local Plan will assist in the delivery of these objectives.

### Huntingdonshire Futures

**1.33** [Huntingdonshire Futures](#) is a collaborative Place Strategy which sets out a shared vision for the future of Huntingdonshire in 2050 and a clear way forward to achieve it. It aims to map out plans for our place, people, economy, and the environment which improve the lives of all of our residents, communities, and businesses. It will guide future strategy and policy developments and investment decisions made by the Council and partners. It was approved on 29 March 2023.

**1.34** The table below highlights the key challenges and opportunities that were identified through the engagement. Not all elements relate to planning, but many of the messages heard from local communities, organisations, businesses and residents are relevant to preparation of this Local Plan too.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**Table 1 Challenges and opportunities identified through Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy**

Theme	Challenges	Opportunities
People and Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal access to social infrastructure, education and employment opportunities between areas</li> <li>• Isolation and loneliness affecting certain groups particularly in more rural areas</li> <li>• Not enough for young people to do</li> <li>• Lack of investment in voluntary sector and decreasing trends in volunteering activity</li> <li>• Poor collaboration between the public sector, businesses, educators, and residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district is a great place to live that supports quality of life, although there is scope for improvements</li> <li>• Diverse and vibrant people, communities and places</li> <li>• Active and engaged community with many local groups and partnerships</li> <li>• Active and engaged community with many local groups and partnerships</li> <li>• Improvements to social and physical activity through enhanced provision and accessibility to open spaces, leisure and sport facilities and community allotments</li> <li>• Involve people, particularly young people, and stakeholder groups in decision making</li> </ul>
Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No distinct identity for Huntingdonshire</li> <li>• High car dependency, bus services do not meet needs, particularly in rural areas and pedestrian and cycle networks are not always in place or joined up</li> <li>• Rural areas feel left behind</li> <li>• Growth of new housing is not matched by sufficient new and/ or improved infrastructure</li> <li>• House prices are rising and there is a lack of affordable housing, particularly for young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Picturesque market towns and villages with varied townscape character</li> <li>• Rich heritage assets and historic buildings, with high concentrations in the centres of market towns</li> <li>• Accessibility and changing workplace culture including the rise in working from home make Huntingdonshire a more attractive place to live</li> <li>• Rich and varied natural landscapes and green spaces including the Ouse Valley and Great Fen</li> <li>• Market towns with a distinctive and varied offer that can co-support each other</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decline of the high street, particularly retail, leisure and evening economy in the market towns</li> <li>• Talent and knowledge drain to Cambridge, Peterborough and Bedfordshire, which attract skilled workforce through greater variety and higher paid jobs</li> <li>• Changing demographics including shrinking of the working age population and an increasingly ageing population</li> <li>• Rising building costs and land values putting pressure on the provision of employment land and space</li> <li>• Need for the right training opportunities to match the job market demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong local economy especially with respect to manufacturing</li> <li>• Great variety of employers and sectors offering diverse employment opportunities</li> <li>• Thriving entrepreneurial networks for Small to Medium Enterprises, start-ups and Community Organisations</li> <li>• Good transport links connecting outside of the district to wider hubs including Cambridge, Peterborough, London and Birmingham</li> <li>• Scope to expand opportunities for young people through training and links to networks</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lot of talk about climate change but no action</li> <li>• New housing developments planned and delivered not ambitious enough in their environmental performance - including locations in flood risk areas, lack of renewable energy generation or electric vehicle charging</li> <li>• Environmentally friendly behaviours can be too expensive and there is a lack of investment and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambitious projects to restore landscapes and improve biodiversity underway</li> <li>• Education and training for residents and businesses could support behaviour change</li> <li>• Good opportunities for renewable energy generation including solar and wind due to climate and topography</li> <li>• Green and open spaces offer great leisure opportunities and support a high quality of life</li> </ul>



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Theme	Challenges	Opportunities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huntingdonshire experiences the effects of climate change including flooding and heat waves</li> <li>Increasing demand for water from population growth and agriculture sector, coupled with water scarcity especially in the dry months of summer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flat land has potential to support cycling as a mode of transport and driver of tourism</li> </ul>

### Huntingdonshire Climate Strategy

**1.35** The Climate Strategy identifies a pathway for decarbonisation of the Council's own activities but more importantly in the context of updating the Local Plan, it also sets out the Council's ambition for district-wide climate action through its role as a positive example in taking action to address its own emissions, as an enabler to support action within our communities and as an encourager to ensure the efforts of those who live, work and visit the district help to reduce Huntingdonshire's carbon emissions. The Climate Strategy is supported by an action plan. Six priority themes are represented in the Climate Strategy as illustrated below.



### Masterplans for Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey

**1.36** Three [masterplans](#) are being developed for Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. These masterplans will focus on the development of a pipeline of projects to enable the Council and stakeholders to pursue funding opportunities, including a range of government opportunities, as they emerge over the coming years, including (but not limited to) the levelling up agenda.

The masterplans will also seek to identify opportunities for regeneration, place shaping, connecting communities and suggestions on a broad range of town centre enhancements. The longer-term ambition is to stimulate public and private sector investment, bringing forward future opportunities for jobs and skills.

**1.37** The initial draft documents were developed with early engagement from the relevant town councils, ward members, local stakeholders and residents. During the autumn of 2022, there was a period of public engagement to capture feedback to further inform the masterplan documents. Completion of the masterplans is expected in 2023.

### St Neots Future High Street Fund

**1.38** The Council has secured funding from the Government's Future High Streets Fund for St Neots. £12.8 million is anticipated to be invested in the town centre. The investment will deliver six projects, transforming the market town for the benefit of local people, businesses, and visitors. The projects of the [St Neots Future High Streets Fund](#) include redevelopment of the Priory Quarter to provide a high-quality event and cultural space; the regeneration of the Old Falcon Inn to bring it back into productive use and protect its heritage status; and a new waterfront route, including a riverside promenade to create a new attraction in the town centre.

**1.39** The Investment in St Neots programme has been informed by previous community and stakeholder engagement including the work to support the [St Neots Masterplan for Growth](#).

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Potential plan period

- 1.40** A key element of preparing a Local Plan update is deciding how long it should run for.
- 1.41** The current Local Plan has a plan period of 2011 to 2036. It is proposed to use 2021 as the base date for this Local Plan as this will coincide with the Census 2021 which forms a robust source of evidence on many aspects of population, housing, health and employment. Local plans typically take between five to seven years to prepare and reach adoption due to the extensive engagement and public examination processes involved although the government hopes to shorten this through possible changes to the preparation system. The Local Plan is required to have a minimum period of 15 years still to run once it is completed. Based on these expectations, the earliest possible end date for the Local Plan would likely be 2043 with some further allowance being sensible to allow for any unexpected delays. The current Local Plan has a 25 year plan period which aligned with the national designation of the enterprise zone at Alconbury Weald for 25 years which is the largest site allocation in the current Local Plan and will continue delivering through the next Local Plan. The same approach could be taken, again effectively rolling the Local Plan forward by 10 years.
- 1.42** The Climate Change Act (2008, as amended 2019) commits the UK government by law to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050. In December 2021 Huntingdonshire District Council adopted the more aspirational target of reaching net zero by 2040. An alternative plan period would be to run to 2050 to coincide with the national net zero target.
- 1.43** Experience gained from examination of the current Local Plan indicated that a cautious approach should be taken to anticipated delivery rates on any significant extensions to existing towns with the independent Planning Inspector extending the anticipated delivery period for Alconbury Weald and wintringham park in St Neots beyond the end of the plan period reflecting concerns over the scale of development, the numbers of

housebuilders delivering new homes at any one time and the ability of the market to absorb large numbers of new homes in close proximity. As indicated in the NPPF the vision for any future similar scale development would need to extend for at least 30 years, however, this does necessitate the whole Local Plan being extended to this duration.

### Question 1

#### Plan period

Do you think the end date for the Local Plan should be:

- 2043 - the shortest time likely to be possible and still retain 15 years lifespan after adoption
- 2046 - retaining 15 years lifespan after adoption and allowing for some flexibility to response to national changes in the planning system
- 2050 - aligning the Local Plan update with the national target date for achieving net zero
- another date - please suggest what it should be and why you think it would be the most appropriate

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 2 Creating a vision and objectives

- 2.1** The Local Plan's vision statement is a key element of a Local Plan. Its role is to set a clear direction for the Local Plan to provide a framework on which all the policies and proposals are built such that collectively they will help to deliver the vision for Huntingdonshire. The vision should provide guidance on priorities for the district and how change will be managed. The Local Plan's vision should reflect the [Corporate Plan](#) and [Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy](#) and other key strategies, as the Local Plan is a delivery mechanism for their land use elements. A series of objectives will support the vision to add detail to what the aspirations are for the district.
- 2.2** The Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy sets out a shared vision for the future of district for the next 30 years and has been co-developed with partners, organisations and Huntingdonshire residents. It articulates Huntingdonshire's aspirations and ambitions, and maps out plans for place, people, economy, and the environment. The vision includes five pathways representing the following aims:
- Pride in Place,
  - Inclusive Economy,
  - Health Embedded,
  - Environmental Innovation, and
  - Travel Transformed
- 2.3** A Local Plan is always a balancing act of differing priorities. It needs to establish what is particularly special about the area that needs to be preserved, whilst ensuring that sufficient growth is facilitated to meet needs. It needs to respond to the challenges of the climate crisis and ecological emergency, whilst providing solutions that can successfully integrate into the local environment. It needs to support the local economy and promote thriving communities whilst ensuring that what makes Huntingdonshire special is retained.

- 2.4** Once we understand the specific planning related issues and needs being faced by Huntingdonshire we can establish a vision and objectives and begin to prepare detailed policies and identify sites for development that will help address them. It is important that the vision is realistic, achievable and distinctive to Huntingdonshire. The vision will need to reflect the fact that changes will inevitably happen. The crucial role of the vision is to shape how that change happens, to prioritise what those changes are and, together with the objectives, manage that change to achieve the best outcomes for Huntingdonshire.

#### Question 2

##### Huntingdonshire Local Plan's vision

How can the Local Plan's vision complement and add land use specific details to the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy's vision and aims? What should be its key priorities?

#### Question 3

##### Huntingdonshire Local Plan's objectives

What objectives would help deliver your priorities for the Local Plan's vision?

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 3 Responding to the climate crisis

- 3.1** Climate change and responding to the climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges facing our society and is now a much bigger priority than ever before. The UK government has committed to the target of being net zero carbon by the year 2050 compared to the 1990 baseline.
- 3.2** The planning system and local plans have a key role to play in delivering meaningful action on climate change. National policy is clear that plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change. Section 182 of the Planning Act (2008) places a legal duty on local planning authorities to ensure that their development plan documents include policies designed to make sure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change. Provisions in the Planning and Energy Act (2008) also enable local planning authorities to set requirements for carbon reduction and renewable energy provision.
- 3.3** The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) established the [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate](#) to conduct a review of the ways that climate change is impacting on the region's local economy and communities. The Commission published their report [Fairness, nature and communities: addressing climate change in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#) in October 2021. It notes that greenhouse gas emissions in the CPCA region are high with emissions almost 25% higher per person than the UK average, excluding the emissions from peat (calculating the amount of emissions from peat is uncertain). It identifies that the region is at high risk from the changing climate, some risks are particularly acute such as flooding, high summer temperatures, water shortages, and damage to the natural carbon stores in the deep peat of the Fens.
- 3.4** The report notes that local government powers in transport and planning, amongst others, will be critical in driving transformation. The report makes a number of recommendations of relevance to the built environment, some of these are aspirational targets and some fall within the scope of planning, including:
- Calling on central government to provide increased powers for local authorities to require higher standards in planning, building and transport
  - New developments must be considered within a spatial strategy that prioritises sustainable development, low emissions and low risks from climate change
  - Adopting a net zero carbon standard for new homes by 2023 and designed for a changing climate, with adoption of a similar standard for non-domestic buildings
  - All existing buildings achieve high energy efficiency standards, and be heated from low-carbon sources
  - Development of new build guidance to address embodied emissions with targets strengthening over time
  - Performance should be actively monitored and standards full enforced, with performance measurements reflecting real-world energy use
- 3.5** This chapter focuses on a range of issues that explore the impact of climate change within Huntingdonshire and how the updated local plan can act to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The issues explored are Huntingdonshire's carbon emissions and targets; carbon sequestration and offsetting; renewable and low carbon energy; energy efficiency and retrofitting; flooding, water supplies and water pollution; and finally waste and recycling.
- Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy Feedback**
- 3.6** Feedback from engagement on the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy highlighted that respondents wished to see strong action regarding climate change and to see house building that is more



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

environmentally conscious and minimises environmental impacts through measures such as net zero building, renewable energy and generation, and reducing water and energy usage. Concerns were also put forward regarding the cost of making environmental improvements to properties and how 'future proof' new homes are to a changing climate.

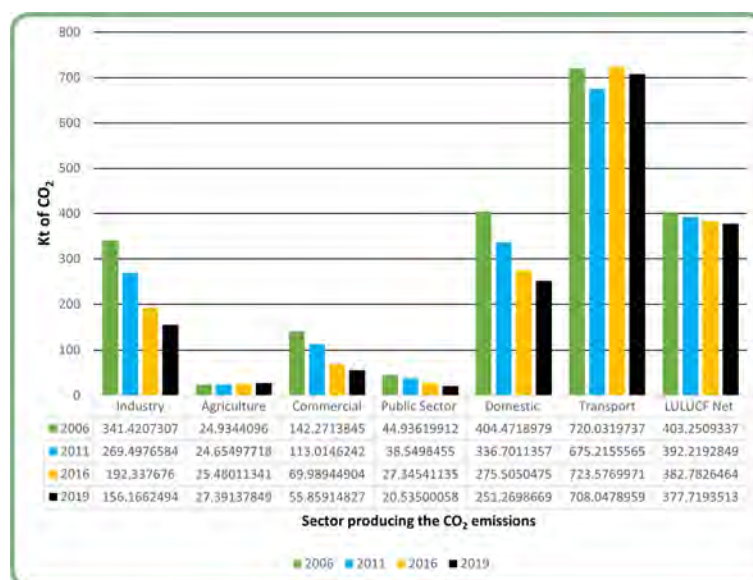
### Issue: Carbon emissions and targets

- 3.7** Greenhouse gas emissions are the largest single driver of climate change. 2011-2020 was the warmest decade recorded, with global average temperature reaching 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels in 2019. Anthropogenic global warming is presently increasing at a rate of 0.2°C per decade. The primary aim of the Paris Agreement on climate change is to keep the increase in the global temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- 3.8** Strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gases would limit climate change. Some benefits such as improved air quality would be seen in the short term. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Working Group I report, Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis](#) notes that it would take 20-30 years to see global temperatures stabilise. The report finds that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach making the targets of the Paris Agreement unachievable.
- 3.9** The UK government has, through amending the Climate Change Act 2008 in 2019, set a legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by 2050.
- 3.10** The planning system and local plans have a key role to play in delivering meaningful action on climate change. National policy is clear that plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change and transitioning to a low carbon future. Mitigation includes actions which seek to reduce and prevent the emission of carbon and other greenhouse gases working towards international, national and locally set net zero carbon targets. Climate change has significant health implications too, particularly from air pollution and overheating which can pose a risk to life for some members of the community. Just as important is the adaption to the already changing climate and to the climate that may be experienced in the future arising from the impact of past emissions such that the built environment is climate resilient to the extreme weather events such as flooding and overheating problems arising from changes in climate. These aspects are explored in greater depth in the 'renewable and low carbon energy', 'energy efficiency and retrofitting', 'flooding, water supplies and water pollution', 'waste and recycling' and 'building design' issues later in this paper.
- 3.11** Every local authority will have different challenges and opportunities for reducing carbon emissions from new development. Key elements which can be influenced at the local authority level include using planning powers to influence the design of future buildings and local transport infrastructure; enforcement of building regulations to ensure policies setting out more ambitious targets are delivered in new buildings when built; and managing risks such as flooding, and protecting the natural environment, wildlife and heritage.
- 3.12** In shaping policy, a robust understanding and evaluation of current and future emissions is needed at the local and national level. The [BEIS annual statistics](#) on territorial carbon dioxide emissions by local authority show CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually since 2005 by sector (the figures exclude aviation, shipping and military transport for which there is no obvious basis for allocation to local areas). Huntingdonshire's emissions has declined from 2,100 Kt in 2005 to 1,597 Kt in 2019, this represents a reduction of almost 25%.
- 3.13** Figure 3.1 provides a breakdown on how much carbon is emitted from each sector across Huntingdonshire for selected years between 2006 and 2019. It shows that CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are reducing across industrial, commercial, domestic and public sectors but shows that transport comprises a particularly

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

high proportion of the district's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at 44% of the 2019 total and has not significantly reduced since 2006. This is heavily influenced by the presence of major strategic transport routes running through the district such as the A1, A14 and East Coast mainline railway and also the largely rural nature of the district meaning a greater reliance on private car usage.

**Figure 3.1 Carbon dioxide emissions by category**



- 3.14** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 contains a range of policies aimed at helping to reduce carbon emissions which the new local plan can build upon. Its strategy for development focuses 75% of the objectively assessed need to spatial planning areas focused on Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and to a lesser extent Ramsey, due to their more comprehensive range of services and facilities and access to public and sustainable travel modes. This is particularly important for Huntingdonshire due to the level of emissions that are from transport. Policy 'LP16 Sustainable

Travel' expects new developments to contribute to an enhanced transport network that supports an increasing proportion of journeys being undertaken by sustainable travel modes. Additionally, 'LP12 Design Implementation' seeks high standards of design including sustainable design and construction methods; and 'LP35 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy' sets out the Council's approach to reducing reliance on fossil fuels and transitioning to a cleaner energy infrastructure network powering Huntingdonshire's homes, businesses and infrastructure.

- 3.15** In December 2021, HDC adopted the aspiration of a net carbon zero Huntingdonshire by 2040 complemented by a series of environmental principles based on those agreed by authorities across the Ox-Cam Arc:

- to target net-zero carbon at a district level by 2040
- to protect, enhance and restore existing nature areas (green spaces) and create new ones (where it is viable to do so)
- to pursue the ambitions of 'A Green Future: Our 25-year Plan to Improve the Environment' and that new development should be designed with a view to minimising and mitigating the effects of climate change
- to ensure existing and new communities see real benefits in their well-being from living in Huntingdonshire
- to use natural resources wisely.

- 3.16** To support this, work began on a [Climate Strategy](#) which was adopted by the [Council in February 2023](#). The Strategy and its accompanying Action Plan set out how the Council will respond to the climate crisis and ecological emergency by:

- Achieving net zero carbon for the Council's own operations by 2040
- Designing Council policies that enable reduction of emissions and provide positive examples for businesses and residents
- Demonstrating that we consider environmental impact in all policymaking and our stewardship of council assets and resources

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- Influencing our updated Local Plan to reflect the priorities outlined in our Climate Strategy
- Maximising the opportunities to work with others collaboratively to address environmental issues

**3.17** The updated Local Plan will be informed by the Climate Strategy and other relevant documents as set out in the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. Taking into account national and international aspirations, the updated Local Plan must provide a framework in which development transitions to being low-carbon and eventually net zero. How this may be achieved is explored throughout this Issues Engagement Paper.

### Question 4

#### Net zero carbon future

What are the key challenges for the updated Local Plan in terms of delivering growth while also working towards the District Council's net zero carbon ambition by 2040?

### Question 5

#### Reducing carbon emissions

How can the updated Local Plan provide a positive strategy in facilitating a low carbon and eventually a net zero carbon future?

### Issue: Carbon sequestration and offsetting

**3.18** As highlighted in previous sections, strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gases are needed to limit climate change with the ambition of becoming net zero. Net zero means cutting greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible, with the remaining emissions being balanced by offsetting or sequestration measures.

**3.19** As well as offsetting new emissions, capturing carbon by removing and storing carbon that is already within the atmosphere should also be undertaken, this is carbon sequestration. Land based carbon sequestration occurs across the natural environment storing a significant amount of carbon into 'carbon sinks', such as forests, grasslands, soils, oceans and other bodies of water. This shows how we can work with the natural environment to tackle the climate crisis. There are also technological ways of removing carbon from the atmosphere with technologies being developed to do this at scale.

**3.20** Carbon sequestration can also be a way of offsetting carbon emissions arising from development if emissions are unavoidable such as by planting trees and incorporating environmental measures that can store carbon. Other ways could be funding renewable energy schemes or financial contributions to carbon reduction funds which could be on or off site. While net zero or low carbon development is the overall aim for development, current building regulations and technologies mean that this may not be achievable in the short term for all developments. Offsetting should only be considered once all other means of reducing carbon emissions in new development have been explored and should not distract from the fundamental goal of reducing carbon emissions. It is considered that offsetting is a short term solution as technologies and processes are developed so that they truly have net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 3.21** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 does not have any policies that directly relate to carbon sequestration and offsetting but policies 'LP3 Green Infrastructure', 'LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity' and 'LP31 Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows' recognise the importance of trees, woodlands, hedgerows, and areas of green infrastructure in storing carbon alongside their ecological, recreational and conservation value.
- 3.22** Huntingdonshire has a rich, diverse natural environment. While vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, these environments also provide great potential to build upon the carbon that they already help to store through their natural processes. Natural England have published the research paper [Carbon Storage and Sequestration by Habitat \(April 2021\)](#) which reviews the scientific evidence base relating to carbon storage and sequestration by semi-natural habitats.
- 3.23** The review found that peatland habitats hold the largest carbon stores of all habitats. There is extensive peatland within the north east of Huntingdonshire providing rich agricultural land. The Great Fen, a strategic habitat restoration project of national significance, is important in restoring peatland locally and managing this resource going forward including preventing the loss of carbon from peat by rewetting it.
- 3.24** Woodlands are also reliable carbon sinks with benefits for biodiversity and other ecosystem services. Hedgerows, orchards and other trees outside woodlands can also sequester and store carbon as well as provide other benefits within an agricultural and biodiversity context. Huntingdonshire has several woodlands, areas of ancient woodland and many mature trees across the district. Planting more trees and increasing canopy cover is important to increase resilience going forward and as part of urban cooling within new developments. However, simply planting more trees is not the sole answer to capturing carbon as trees need to be in the right places, be an appropriate species for their area and also take time to establish themselves. The conservation and enhancement of existing areas of established and mature trees, hedgerows and woodland is therefore vital.
- 3.25** Actions need to be taken to conserve areas of mature and ancient woodland, conserve and restore peatland and increase tree coverage to support and maximise these processes into the future. Development needs to ensure that it will not detrimentally harm these environments and where possible provide an environmental gain. Not doing so may result in the destruction and degradation of natural habitats leading to lower carbon sequestration rates and potentially increased carbon emissions through release of the carbon stored within these natural assets.
- 3.26** Local Plans can support existing carbon stores and provide additional offsetting measures through having policies and site allocations that support the provision of green infrastructure, landscaping, habitat creation or restoration, new woodland and tree planting.

### Question 6

#### Carbon sequestration

How can the Local Plan help maintain existing carbon sinks and create new opportunities to store additional carbon within the natural environment?

### Question 7

#### Carbon offsetting

Should the Local Plan make provisions for carbon offsetting where a development can demonstrate that carbon emissions cannot be reduced any further?



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Issue: Renewable and low carbon energy

- 3.27** The NPPF is clear that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future responding to climate change including supporting increasing renewable and low carbon energy generation. Decentralised energy is defined in the NPPF as being 'local renewable and local low carbon energy sources.' Renewable and low carbon energy is defined as including 'energy for heating and cooling as well as generating electricity. Renewable energy covers those energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment – from the wind, the fall of water, the movement of the oceans, from the sun and also from biomass and deep geothermal heat. Low carbon technologies are those that can help reduce emissions (compared to conventional use of fossil fuels).'
- 3.28** The NPPF requires local plans provide a positive strategy for the supply of renewable and low carbon energy maximising their potential within development whilst also ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily. Whilst this is hugely important, planning for new development that has less energy demands in the first place by raising energy efficiency standards is also key (see the issue 'energy efficiency and retrofitting').
- 3.29** A dramatic acceleration in transitioning to clean, sustainable energy such as renewable and low carbon sources of energy is needed in order to reach local, national and global climate and sustainable energy goals. Data from the [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy \(BEIS\) for 2020](#) details electricity consumption levels for Huntingdonshire of 324.3 gigawatt hours (GWh) for all domestic use and 486.6 GWh for non-domestic use. [Equivalent BEIS data for gas consumption in 2020](#) details gas consumption levels at 877.5 GWh for all domestic use and 235.1 GWh for non-domestic use.
- 3.30** Renewable energy generation within Huntingdonshire is provided through wind power, photovoltaic panels (solar power) and a small amount of biomass power generation but there is potential for more across Huntingdonshire particularly as the costs for renewables are reducing as technology improves and becomes increasingly available.
- 3.31** Policy 'LP35 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy' of the HLP2036 sets out the Council's approach to development proposals for renewable and low carbon energy generation. The policy identifies that the Council's [Wind Energy Development in Huntingdonshire SPD \(2014\)](#) , [Wind Turbine Developments: A Guidance Note for Applicants and Agents](#) and the [Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD \(2022\)](#) should be used to inform assessment of potential impacts on the surrounding landscape of wind energy proposals and for other renewable or low carbon energy proposals respectively.
- 3.32** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 has prevented further erection of wind turbines within the area of the Great Fen and its visual and landscape setting to protect this valuable nature conservation site.
- 3.33** The district has several solar farms, the largest being situated at Little Staughton Airfield/ Top Farm covering 149 ha and capable of generating 40 megawatt (MW) of power. Two solar farms at Abbotsley and Abbots Ripton are each capable of generating 25 MW of power. Nine smaller solar farms can collectively generate 53 MW of power one of which was granted permission in December 2021 for an extension to provide an additional 20 MW of power. Compared to wind turbines, solar farms require extensive areas of land, however, this brings with it some scope for complementary agricultural uses such as grazing land for animals as well as biodiversity rich areas where wildflowers can grow.
- 3.34** As well as solar farms, across the district Huntingdonshire there are numerous small scale photovoltaic installations on existing buildings. These do not always require planning permission or prior approval so quantifying the energy they provide is difficult.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**Solar farm at Grafham Water**



**Wind farm near Tick Fen**



### Question 8

#### Renewable energy

How can opportunities for renewable forms of energy generation such as wind and solar power be promoted across the district balancing any impacts on the local landscape and communities?

development of one or perhaps two larger buildings, usually blocks of flats; district heating includes distributing large-scale sources of heat over a large area and connecting multiple buildings in a heat network. There is also the potential that networks can be connected to one another forming increasingly more cost effective sources of low carbon energy.

### Question 9

#### Heat networks

How can the Local Plan support more community and/ or district heating networks across the district to provide a more sustainable heating solution?

- 3.35** Not all parts of the district have access to mains gas with some locations relying on individual oil tanks, particularly in more rural areas. In such circumstances alternative heating systems may offer a more sustainable solution which could be at a community scale.
- 3.36** A heat network is a distribution system of insulated pipes that takes heat from a central source and delivers it to a number of domestic or non-domestic buildings. It offers a low carbon energy solution that reduces carbon emissions from heating properties and can save money on energy bills. Community heating is about supplying heat to a relatively small

- 3.37** Within new developments, it is increasingly common to find sources of decentralised energy systems powering homes and businesses as well as community/ district heating. Renewable and low carbon technologies is undoubtedly a growth sector with increasingly more new developments integrating such technologies.
- 3.38** The Local Plan update must plan for sustainable development and this includes renewable and low carbon energy generation as well as other design principles that create net zero carbon places. However, these design principles need to be realistic and deliverable and subject to a viability assessment. It is not the role of viability assessments to compromise sustainable development but they should be used to ensure that policies are achievable, and that the total cumulative cost of all relevant policies will not undermine deliverability of the plan. Further design considerations on planning for a changing climate are set out in the 'Building Design' issue later in this paper.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 10

#### Renewable and low carbon energy in new developments

How can the Local Plan help to integrate renewable and low carbon energy within new developments?

#### Issue: Energy efficiency and retrofitting

- 3.39** Increasingly, buildings are moving towards being heated by energy that is sourced from clean, renewable sources, have heating (and cooling) systems comprised of low and zero carbon technologies, rather than traditional forms of heating such as boilers burning gas or oil. It is also imperative to decrease the amount of energy that is needed in the first place. Increasing energy efficiency is important not only from an environmental perspective within the climate change agenda, it is also important socially and economically in reducing fuel poverty and the implications this can have on people's health and well-being.
- 3.40** In the UK, energy efficiency of new buildings is fundamentally shaped by [Building Control Regulations and approved documents](#).
- 3.41** Planning and the built environment plays a significant part in contributing to a net zero carbon future. To assist in this goal, the Future Building Standards are expected to start from 2025 and will produce highly efficient new non-domestic buildings which use low-carbon heat and have the best fabric standards possible, reducing carbon emissions by 75-80% for an average home, compared to current requirements. This represents a fabric first approach of reducing heating and energy demand to a very low level. By building future buildings to this standard, the Government anticipates that no further energy efficiency retrofit work will be necessary to enable these buildings to become zero-carbon.
- 3.42** In the interim until this standard is introduced, uplifts to Part L (Conservation of fuel and power) and F (Ventilation) of the Building Regulations and the introduction of Part O (Overheating) and Part S (Infrastructure for charging electric vehicles) were introduced on 15 June 2022. These uplifts will see a 30% cut on emissions from new homes, as well as a 27% cut on new buildings including offices and shops and are a step towards new development being net zero carbon as well as improved ventilation requirements to address overheating in buildings. In addition, from 2025 new build properties will no longer be powered by gas or oil fired boilers and heating systems. While a step in the right direction, more may need to be done to ensure that new buildings are truly net zero either through higher energy efficiency standards or the incorporation of renewables and offsetting measures.
- 3.43** The time it will take for truly low carbon and eventually net zero carbon new builds to be built at scale, compared with the urgency of the climate crisis highlights the potential need to set higher local standards for energy efficiency and low carbon development. The updated local plan has a role to play in this.
- 3.44** The Planning and Energy Act 2008 provides that local authorities may include in their local plans reasonable requirements for development in their area to comply with energy efficiency standards that exceed the energy requirements of Building Regulations, this could include aspiring to Passive standard. The Written Ministerial Statement of 25 March 2015 sought to remove this power, however, in the Government's response to the Future Buildings Standards consultation in January 2021, it was confirmed that local planning authorities will retain powers in the immediate term to set local energy efficiency standards for new homes but does not express whether there is a limit to this. Any policies setting energy standards should not duplicate existing Building Regulation standards and need to be based on robust and credible evidence including demonstrating their viability in the local development market.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 3.45** The [Huntingdonshire Design Guide \(2017\)](#) provides design guidance and supports the implementation of HLP2036's policy 'LP12 Design Implementation' which sets out the Council's approach to achieving high standards of development and includes energy and water efficiency.
- 3.46** Higher building standards are available such as the Passivhaus standards which demonstrate extremely high levels of energy efficiency but can be difficult to achieve, expensive to get certified and go well beyond current building regulation standards. The core focus of Passivhaus is to dramatically reduce the requirement for space heating and cooling, whilst also creating excellent indoor comfort levels. This is primarily achieved by adopting a fabric first approach to the design by specifying high levels of insulation to the thermal envelope with exceptional levels of airtightness and the use of whole house mechanical ventilation.
- 3.47** To include policies that require buildings to be built to higher standards than are set nationally at the time permission is granted or they are built, it will be necessary to provide evidence of the need to go above and beyond national standards in Huntingdonshire. Higher standards are likely to involve higher costs which would need to be balanced against other priorities such as providing more affordable housing or more land for biodiversity net gain.

### Question 11

#### Energy efficiency targets

With the Future Buildings Standard expected to be in place from 2025 and with the newly uplifted Building Regulations, should the new Local Plan look to set higher standards than these?

- 3.48** While the Local Plan can have policies regarding new builds and their energy efficiency that surpass standards set within Building Regulations (subject to appropriate evidence), the issue of retrofitting the existing building

stock to make them more energy efficient can also be explored. However, it should be acknowledged that the influence that the local plan can have on existing properties is limited because its policies apply only when a planning application is made.

- 3.49** Retrofitting involves making alterations to properties to make them more energy efficient, focusing on the fabric of the house first and reducing energy bills. It can also include making changes to buildings to make them more resistance and resilient to flood events and overheating. The construction, age and energy performance of the current housing stock presents a challenge in effective retrofitting to make these homes low carbon with additional measures such as solar panels providing offsetting opportunities to make homes carbon neutral and further lowering household bills. While this may be largely outside of the direct influence of planning as some alterations would not necessarily need planning permission, the updated local plan can still play a role by ensuring that where planning permission is required, proposals are consistent with the Council's approach towards energy, design and heritage matters.

### Question 12

#### Retrofitting the housing stock

How can the Local Plan support the retrofitting of existing homes and non-residential buildings so that they are more energy efficient?

- 3.50** Buildings need to be energy efficient to not just limit their impact on the environment but so that they are cheaper to run for people. Households are considered to be in fuel poverty if their dwellings equates to an energy efficiency rating of band D to G and a disposable income after housing costs and energy needs of less than 60% below the national median. The [BEIS publish fuel poverty 2020 dataset](#) shows that within Huntingdonshire fuel poverty affects 10.95% of households overall. With



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

price rises since April 2022, the number of households now classed as being in fuel poverty will likely have increased. Not being able to afford to properly heat homes can leave people living in cold and damp conditions which can lead to health issues such as respiratory, heart and circulatory diseases and mental health problems putting increased pressure on local health services.

### Question 13

#### Fuel poverty

How can the Local Plan help to make homes more affordable to heat to support a healthy population?

### Issue: Flooding, water supplies and water pollution

- 3.51** Huntingdonshire has a number of water courses within its administrative area including the Rivers Great Ouse and Nene. In addition, there are several brooks and other water courses as well as numerous lakes, many made from old gravel workings and the Grafham Water reservoir. Some areas of Huntingdonshire located in the Fens area are below sea level. The impacts of climate change are expected to exacerbate flooding events, limit access to water supplies, and affect water quality.
- 3.52** Huntingdonshire sits within the driest region in the country, it receives less than 700mm of rain a year but experiences a relatively even distribution of this<sup>(1)</sup>. Huntingdonshire District Council considers it important that any further areas that are at above average risk of flooding or water related

issues are identified and addressed through the Local Plan. The impact of region-wide abstraction, water supply and cumulative growth across the catchment will also have a marked impact on the district.

- 3.53** Sources of flood risk include that from rivers and the sea, directly from rainfall on the ground, surface and rising groundwater, overwhelmed sewers and drainage systems, and from reservoirs, canals and lakes and other artificial sources.
- 3.54** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) addresses the issues of flood risk, waste water management and surface water in relation to new development proposals<sup>(2)</sup>. This includes directing development away from areas at high risk of flooding, requiring mitigation to alleviate or improve potential flood risk and to ensure that wastewater capacity e.g. sewerage networks are not put under undue pressure. The Plan also has to ensure that there is capacity within the network to treat wastewater arising from new developments and has implemented measures such as Sustainable Drainage Systems to manage surface water. These help to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding, removing pollutants from urban run-off and combining water management with green space providing amenity, recreational and biodiversity benefits.
- 3.55** The Council produced a number of pieces of evidence to inform the requirements for new developments and allocations including a [Strategic Flood Risk Assessment \(SFRA\)](#) and a [Water Cycle Study \(WCS\)](#) which assessed the current situation and measures that could be employed. Policies were also informed by the [Cambridgeshire Flood and Water Supplementary Planning Document](#) which sets out approaches to flood and water management. Current work is underway to develop Integrated Water Management Studies which will include an SFRA and WCS.

1 Met Office - [description of regional climates in the UK](#)

2 Local Plan policies LP5, 6 and 15.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 3.56** Historically, the district has experienced a number of surface water / drainage related flood events; causes range from insufficient storm and combined drainage capacity to poor surface water management<sup>(3)</sup>. Current identified areas that experience issues relating to flooding in the district include, but are not limited to, St Neots, Alconbury, Wyton, Ramsey and Godmanchester. Some of the flood related issues are connected to infrastructure capacity, whilst others may be due to the settlement's proximity to the River Great Ouse, surface and groundwater flooding, or residual risk.

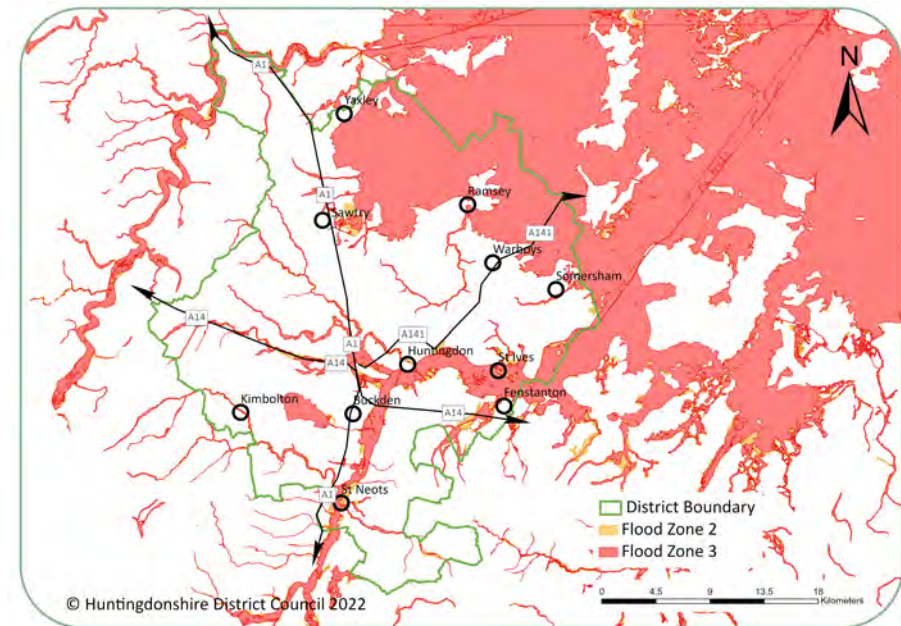
### Question 14

#### Local flood risk - resilience and resistance

How can the Local Plan support increased resilience and resistance to flood risk in your local area?

- 3.57** The majority of fluvial flood events are associated with the River Great Ouse and its tributaries, whilst in Ramsey fluvial flood risk results from High Lode which flows northwards through the town.
- 3.58** Tidal flood risk can also cause a potential risk within the district. Although the tidal limit of the River Great Ouse is at Brownhill, just upstream of Earith, the river as far upstream as St Ives can still be affected by the tide ([Future Fens Flood Risk Management Baseline Report 2020](#)).
- 3.59** The impacts of climate change will see increases in extreme weather events, leading to increased rainfall, rainfall intensity and sea level rises and drought all of which will intensify the impact of all sources of flooding in the district.

**Map 3.1 Flood Zones**



Source: [Huntingdonshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2017](#)

- 3.60** Increased flooding due to climate change will influence where development can be sustainably located. Inappropriate development could put future economies, people, ecological systems and biodiversity at risk. Likewise, inappropriately located development can impact on existing developments, infrastructure, public safety and agricultural productivity creating social and economic impacts across the district. New developments can in some cases increase runoff into streams due to increased hard surfacing moving flood waters further afield taking urban pollutants with them.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 3.61** In some instances opportunities to reinvigorate or regenerate an area of previously developed land could prove difficult if that area is at a higher risk of flooding. Examples of sites located in such areas include the former car showroom on London Road, St Ives which now has permission for 49 homes (18/02726/FUL) and Tyrell's Marina in Godmanchester (16/00906/FUL). One particular successful now completed development was Hemingford Lodge (formerly Lyndhurst), London Road, St Ives (0502756/FUL). The site was located in Flood Zone 3a and redeveloped to provide 12 flats. The innovative redevelopment used a barrel shaped undercroft solution to allow floodwater to flow away decreasing the risk of flooding.

### Question 15

#### Flooding and the location of new development

What approach should the Local Plan take to the location of development in relation to areas at risk of flooding?

- 3.62** Due to existing flood related issues in the district and requirements in the NPPG<sup>(4)</sup> the Local Plan, when assessing flood risk must ensure that "Measures to avoid, control, manage and mitigate flood risk should also not increase flood risk elsewhere". This could be achieved by using green infrastructure, safeguarding land for flood risk management or by requiring mitigation measures such as sustainable drainage systems. These measures would have to be balanced with other infrastructure requirements to ensure that the Local Plan can demonstrate its requirement to deliver more homes, and that land for economic growth in sustainable locations can still be provided as required by national planning policy.

### Question 16

#### Flooding risk management

What measures could the Local Plan employ to reduce the overall level of flood risk in the area and beyond whilst still providing opportunities for growth?

- 3.63** Water supply and management in Huntingdonshire is undertaken by Anglian Water (water and sewerage undertaker) and Cambridge Water (water undertaker). Water supply in the Anglian Water region comes from surface water supplies such as rivers and reservoirs or ground water sources such as wells, boreholes and springs. [The Draft Regional Water Resources Plan for Eastern England November 2022](#) identifies that the Environment Agency has classified the whole of Eastern England as being 'in serious water stress'. Taking into account population growth and climate change and the need to restore and protect the environment, current predictions estimate that by 2050 there will be a water deficit of 598 Ml/d (Megalitres per day) in the Eastern Region, which equates to around 33% of baseline supply in 2025. In addition the Plan highlighted that "average household consumption is currently 142 litres per person per day (l/p/d), having risen to a peak of 151 l/p/d during Covid-19" which re-distributed populations (from towns and cities to rural areas) and instigated more working from home (page 23).
- 3.64** Water Resources East also notes the importance of local water resources to the farming community. Farming relies on local water resources that lie beneath their farm or are stored on or flow past their farm. "Hotter, drier spring and summer growing seasons mean more water will be needed to irrigate crops in the warming climate." (Page 74). More than 60% of England's abstraction licences for irrigation are located in the Eastern region. Power generation also requires a lot of water. Power plants

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

across the region are major users of river water in the region, particularly from the River Trent and River Great Ouse", (page 78). It is incorrect to assume that renewable energy production will not impact on water abstraction or usage. Decreased flows and reduced ground and surface water mean less water to abstract for essential services such as food production and power generation.

- 3.65** The Local Plan will need to look at what can be incorporated into new development, residential, business and the natural environment to ensure undue pressure is not put on the existing water supply, creating more water efficient developments. It will also need to ensure that new locations identified for growth do not put unnecessary strain on water supply.

### Question 17

#### Water supply

What measures could be implemented to ensure efficient water supply is maintained across the district?

- 3.66** Huntingdonshire's [Stage 2: Detailed Water Cycle Study. \(December 2014\)](#) identified at the time that a number of wastewater treatment works were at or nearing capacity, these sites included Huntingdon, Oldhurst, Ramsey, Somersham and St Neots. Initiatives such as the Oxford to Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership and growth in nearby authorities could also place increasing strain on wastewater treatment works, water quality and flooding from all sources which will need to be considered by Huntingdonshire District Council, private water companies and public and private organisations. The Local Plan will have to ensure that the location of new growth does not adversely affect water resources or water resources management infrastructure.

### Question 18

#### Waste water

What could the Local Plan to ensure that waste water capacity is maintained across the district?

- 3.67** To protect drinking water supply from pollution, the Environment Agency defines a number of Source Protection Zones (SPZ), these zones include areas where the level of risk of contamination is high. This can be exacerbated by certain situations such as storing pollutants like petrol underground or from soakaways from septic tanks. Any development within a SPZ should demonstrate that it will not cause contamination to ensure that water is safe for human consumption. Source Protection Zones in Huntingdonshire are located in the east of Huntingdon, south of St Ives to Fenstanton and are also located in Little Paxton and to the south and east of Waresley/ Great Gransden<sup>(5)</sup>.
- 3.68** Huntingdonshire sits within the Anglian River Basement District; *Classification Data* from the [Environment Agency](#) (Updated on 14 September 2021) shows the environmental condition or "status" of water bodies in the Anglian River Basement District. 634 water bodies are identified within this District which comprise 526 rivers, canals and surface water transfers, 46 lakes, 13 coastal, 18 estuarine and 31 groundwater. Surface and ground waters are also assessed by ecological and chemical status.
- 3.69** Impacts of climate change and growth could increase pressure on water bodies for example through increased surface water run-off. This may impact on the future ecological status of these water bodies in terms of chemical pollutants, reduced ecological status and the loss of important plants and wildlife. Nutrient pollution is becoming a major environmental

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

risk which has led Natural England to advocate for [nutrient neutrality](#) in new developments, meaning that they should not increase the risk of nutrient pollution. Due to the nature of water, new development in one district can cause pollution much further away. In 2022, an increasing number of local planning authorities were notified by Natural England that development in certain identified areas could not proceed if they increase nutrient levels.

### Question 19

#### Water pollution

How can the Local Plan ensure new developments do not increase water pollutants and what measures could be employed?

### Issue: Waste and recycling

- 3.70** In responding to the challenge of climate change, the NPPF is clear that planning should encourage the reuse of existing resources. Reducing the amount of waste created and recycling materials where possible can reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill, minimising their environmental impact and prolonging their lifespans. It also reduces the need to use finite natural resources and can help to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Reusing, repairing and recycling are key aspects of a circular economy whereby waste and the consumption of finite resources are reduced to support a more sustainable way of living. This approach can be implemented by promoting the use of sustainable building materials including those made from waste products.
- 3.71** In England, the waste hierarchy is enshrined in law through the Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2011. The way waste is managed in the UK is continually evolving and is set out in the [National Waste Management Plan for England](#) and [National Planning Policy for Waste](#). The waste

hierarchy, gives priority to preventing the creation of waste in the first place, followed by preparing waste for reuse; to recycling, and then recovery. Disposal, such as landfill, is regarded as the worst option.

- 3.72** Huntingdonshire performs very well in regards to recycling. In order to maintain this performance and further reduce the amount of material that goes to landfill, new buildings need to be designed to help residents and users to reduce waste generation and recycle a higher proportion of their waste. This includes provision of convenient space for storage of recyclable materials awaiting collection, usually in wheeled bins. Growth will place additional demand on existing waste and recycling services. Planning obligations can be negotiated for new developments to ensure there is adequate provision for such services to meet the needs it will create.
- 3.73** Policy 'LP14 Amenity' of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals to provide 'adequate and accessible waste storage...' with the supporting text of the policy referencing Building Regulations [Approved Document H](#) (section 6) which sets out requirements for waste storage as well as the [RECAP Waste Management Design Guide SPD](#) adopted by Cambridgeshire County Council and the [Waste Collection Policies](#) produced by the Council. Equally the [Huntingdonshire Design Guide \(2017\)](#) provides detailed design guidance on how waste storage can be integrated into good quality sustainable design and construction. Policy 'LP12 Design Implementation' includes a section on sustainable design and construction methods with criterion m. requiring proposals to successfully demonstrate the integration of the functional needs of the development including refuse and recycling... so that their dominance is minimised.
- 3.74** Cambridgeshire County Council is the waste disposal authority and deals directly with writing waste policies and determining waste planning applications. It produces a minerals and waste local plan which is used to determine waste planning applications. This also forms part of



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Huntingdonshire's development plan and the policies contained within it are used, where they are relevant, in the determination of planning applications in Huntingdonshire.

**3.75** The [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Plan \(2021\)](#) supports the production and supply of recycled/secondary aggregates, which can then be reused, for example in new roads within developments. Recycled aggregates are those resulting from the processing of inorganic materials previously used in construction and demolition. Secondary aggregates are those from industrial wastes such as glass, railway ballast, fine ceramic waste, and scrap tyres; and industrial and minerals by-products. Utilising secondary and recycled aggregates represents a potentially major source of materials for construction, helping to conserve primary materials and minimising waste. This supports a circular economy approach whereby the maximum value is achieved from materials. This also reduces the embodied carbon of development whereby carbon emissions arising from the sourcing of materials, transportation of materials and the materials themselves are reduced.

**3.76** As part of the waste hierarchy, energy can be created from waste in the form of biomass (anaerobic digestion). This is an effective way to treat separately collected food waste to produce energy and valuable bio-fertiliser. This ensures that food waste is diverted from landfill and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Biomass installations are a small contributor to Huntingdonshire's renewable energy sources with power installations primarily being at educational, agricultural and industrial sites. The opportunities for biomass as part of the renewable energy options for Huntingdonshire are explored in greater depth in the issue 'renewable and low carbon energy' where the existing policy 'LP35 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy' is also explained.

**3.77** While much of waste planning is addressed in other plans, Huntingdonshire in its Local Plan still has a part to play in regards to promoting and delivering the waste hierarchy, for example:

- planning well-designed places that conserve natural resources and maximise the reuse and recycling of materials and waste
- integrating local waste management opportunities in proposed new development
- where relevant, considering the likely impact of proposed, non-waste related development on existing waste management sites and on sites and areas allocated for waste management
- promoting sound management of waste from any proposed development, such as encouraging on-site management of waste or including a planning condition to require a developer to set out how waste arising from the development is to be dealt with
- including a requirement for a planning condition promoting sustainable design of any proposed development through the use of recycled products, recovery of on-site material and the provision of facilities for the storage and regular collection of waste

### Question 20

#### Waste management and circular economy approach

How can the Local Plan maximise opportunities to integrate recycled materials into the construction of new developments and minimise waste?

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 4 Protecting and enhancing the natural environment

- 4.1** The natural environment is an irreplaceable resource that shapes the character and identity of places. The [25 Year Environment Plan](#) sets out the government's aspirations of improving the UK's air and water quality; protecting threatened plants, trees and wildlife species; and the goals to do this while working with specialists, local communities and businesses. Since then, the [Environment Act \(2021\)](#) set a mandatory biodiversity net gain of 10% calculated using a national methodology the most recent of which is [Biodiversity Metric 3.1](#) published by Natural England in April 2022.
- 4.2** Additionally, the NPPF is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes and biodiversity. The location of nature conservation sites and the presence of priority species which need to be conserved will influence the locations of site allocations and the policies within the updated local plan.
- 4.3** Huntingdonshire has numerous nature conservation designations, including several of international or national importance and areas of strategic green infrastructure which shape Huntingdonshire's landscape and urban areas. Together they form a rich nature network. These contribute significantly to the attractiveness of Huntingdonshire by enhancing the quality of life enjoyed by residents and helping the local economy by attracting visitors and businesses.
- 4.4** The Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 contains policies on green infrastructure, the countryside, biodiversity and geodiversity, and trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows. Other detailed planning guidance is available in the [Landscape and Townscape SPD \(2022\)](#) and [Design Guide \(2017\)](#).

- 4.5** This chapter includes the following issues: Huntingdonshire's landscapes, the natural environment and nature conservation designations; green infrastructure; biodiversity net gain; and air quality.

#### Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy Feedback

- 4.6** Feedback from engagement on the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy highlighted that the district benefits from good amounts of accessible greenspace. These were valued by local communities but concerns were frequently raised about them being at risk. When asked about the best aspects of living in the district the countryside, access to green places, the rivers and wildlife featured strongly.

#### Issue: Huntingdonshire's landscapes

- 4.7** Conserving and enhancing the natural environment across the district means that Huntingdonshire's diverse, high quality and locally distinctive landscapes can be enjoyed by existing and future residents. They can also continue to provide habitats for a diverse range of wildlife; support the local economy, agricultural and tourism sectors; and frame urban areas and set the character of rural settlements. Landscapes have been shaped by natural processes over a long period of time but also by human activity such as by agriculture and development.
- 4.8** The NPPF is clear that plans should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and that strategic policies should provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes.
- 4.9** Huntingdonshire is a largely rural district with the countryside occupying a large area of the district, the strategy for development within the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 sought to limit development within the countryside with exceptions outlined in policy 'LP10 The Countryside'.
- 4.10** Huntingdonshire includes a significant proportion of high quality agricultural land, and a large number of nature conservation designations of international and national importance as well as locally protected sites of biodiversity

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

value. Across the district are areas of green space and green infrastructure within urban areas that support extensive ecological networks. There are also water bodies such as Grafham Water, and former gravel extraction pits such as Paxton Pits and Hinchbrook Park lakes which support biodiversity and opportunities for recreation and leisure. Nature conservation designations and green infrastructure are explored in greater depth in subsequent sections.

**4.11** Many locally and nationally important habitats and species are found in the district including meadows, hedgerows, ponds, grazing marsh, woodland, orchards, parkland, fen, wetlands, reedbeds and lakes. Many of these habitats comprise important features in the landscape strongly influencing its character. Huntingdonshire's [Landscape and Townscape SPD \(2022\)](#) details the context, key characteristics and pressures facing each landscape character area and identifies a total of 9 landscape character areas that can be broadly divided into the following categories:

- **low-lying fens** - distinctive for its low-lying, flat, regular open character arising from its man-made network of drainage channels and waterways. The Fens extend north and east into surrounding districts. It is predominantly used for arable agriculture on its dark peaty soil, as such there is sparse woodland cover.
- **undulating claylands** - includes several of Huntingdonshire's largest settlements and major transport corridors namely the A1/A14. It has an undulating landform, established hedgerows and woodlands including the extensive ancient woodlands located between Aversley Wood and Wennington Woods.
- **upland areas (the Wolds)** - have a strong topography of ridges bisected by pronounced valleys. The ridges are generally used for arable farming. The area has been significantly influenced by medieval development with many scheduled monuments present and distinctive historic villages and ecclesiastical architecture.
- **main river valleys** - these consist of the River Great Ouse and the River Nene. The Great Ouse Valley has seen large scale gravel extraction which has since been flooded to create habitats for wildlife,

nature reserves and fisheries. The flood-plain meadows play an essential role for flood storage and flow attenuation as well as being of high ecological value. In the Nene Valley, the local availability of limestone has had a strong influence on the vernacular architecture of the area.

**4.12** Huntingdonshire's landscape and its distinctive qualities are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, insensitive new development and land management practices. These can fragment landscapes, undermine their key characteristics and cause visual intrusion. The expansive, flat wetlands of the Fens are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change degrading fertile peat soils and its landscape character due to increased variability in water levels and higher temperatures affecting the peat.

The low-lying landscape of the Fens



The undulating Claylands, photo is of Wistow Wood



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

The upland areas known as the Wolds



The main river valleys, photo is of the River Great Ouse



### Question 21

#### Landscape character

How can the Local Plan conserve Huntingdonshire's landscape character?

### Question 22

#### Relationship with the Great Ouse Valley

What more can be done to connect Huntingdon, St Neots and St Ives with the landscape of the Great Ouse Valley?

### Question 23

#### Relationship with the Great Fen

What more can be done to connect Ramsey with the landscape of the Great Fen?

### Issue: The natural environment and nature conservation designations

- 4.13** The government's [25 year Environment Plan \(2018\)](#) seeks to achieve a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife. It seeks to do this nationally by:
- restoring 75% of our one million hectares of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites to favourable condition, securing their wildlife value for the long term
  - creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat outside the protected site network, focusing on priority habitats as part of a wider set of land management changes providing extensive benefits
  - taking action to recover threatened, iconic or economically important species of animals, plants and fungi, and where possible to prevent human induced extinction or loss of known threatened species in England and the Overseas Territories
  - increasing woodland in England in line with our aspiration of 12% cover by 2060: this would involve planting 180,000 hectares by the end of 2042
- 4.14** Nature conservation sites are designated at an international, national or local level depending on their biological or geological value. Internationally important nature sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs),



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and Ramsar sites. Nationally important sites include Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves (NNRs) which benefit from statutory protection. Locally designated sites such as County Wildlife Sites (CWSs) and Local Geological Sites (LGSs) are not statutorily defined but provide important habitats to sustain a wealth of biodiversity and geodiversity. Details on biodiversity net gain is covered in a subsequent issue section.

- 4.15** Huntingdonshire's natural environment is varied and contains many sites that are of biodiversity importance, including those designated at international level (Ramsar, SAC and SPA) recognising their strategic contribution to biodiversity. These are the Ouse Washes, Portholme and Woodwalton Fen. There are 26 nationally designated SSSIs, by area 62.9% of SSSIs in Huntingdonshire were judged to be in favourable condition in 2020/21, with a further 32.5% of their area being in an unfavourable but recovering state. Huntingdonshire also benefits from having 135 County wildlife Sites of local nature conservation, biological or geological interest. These cover 2,348.7 ha of the district along with 133.9 kms of linear sites which are waterways where the county wildlife site comprises the river and adjacent semi-natural habitat.
- 4.16** In Huntingdonshire there are in the region of 45 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) sites and 25 Plantation on Ancient Woodland (PAWS) sites, totalling approximately 1500ha of woodland. None are currently known to be under threat. They host a complex network of habitats and as such are rich in biodiversity.
- 4.17** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan 2036 policy 'LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity' sets out the Council's approach to development proposals in relation to biodiversity and geodiversity including identified sites. Policy 'LP31 Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows' sets out the Council's approach to protecting existing trees, woodlands, hedges and hedgerows, particularly those of visual, historic or nature conservation value, from the impacts of development and to halt the loss of trees in Huntingdonshire.
- 4.18** The Council's approach to tree protection, care, planting and risk management is set out in the Council's [Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire 2020-2025](#). It contains a 10 year action plan which shapes the Council's tree related management and projects. The strategy embeds the [10 values of The Woodland Trust's Tree Charter](#) (which aims to promote the creation and promotion of greener landscapes and the benefits of trees for the future) into our tree management policies.
- 4.19** The natural environment, nature conservation sites and areas of ancient woodland are vulnerable to new development and land management practices which can fragment habitats and migration routes for wildlife which can impact their lifecycles. The location of nature conservation sites will impact where new development allocations can be located. Additionally, visitor pressures to these sites can on one hand support their conservation and fund management and enhancement projects but can also adversely harm their carefully balanced ecosystems through physical damage, littering and pollution.
- 4.20** Light pollution can have adverse impacts on wildlife by interrupting natural rhythms including migration, reproduction and feeding patterns and the quality of life of residents by disrupting sleep and for some increasing levels of anxiety. It can also harm people's enjoyment of the countryside. In 2015, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) commissioned a [national interactive map of England's light pollution](#). Huntingdonshire is the 92nd darkest authority area of the 326 within England recorded on the dataset. The rural parts of the district are the darkest with some small concentrations of increased levels of light within villages. Generally, darker skies are also observed where there are nature reserves and nature conservation designations.
- 4.21** Climate change also poses significant risks to the delicate balance of the biodiversity and habitats located within these ecosystems. For example, some species of trees such as beech are more sensitive to drought. The increase in severity or frequency of drought may lead to a change in woodland structure and composition. Also, changes in temperatures and



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

rainfall levels can impact the lifecycles and availability of insects for birds and bats to feed on. Increased carbon in the atmosphere can also alter the composition of leaves and plants which may harm their conservation and the reason for designating some nature conservation sites.

### Question 24

#### Natural environment

How can the Local Plan help to conserve and enhance Huntingdonshire's natural environment?

### Question 25

#### Nature conservation network

Should the Local Plan identify opportunities for the restoration or creation of new habitat areas in association with planned development to enhance the network of nature conservation sites across the district?

### Issue: Green infrastructure

- 4.22** Green infrastructure is a key land use which serves to balance built development. The NPPF defines green infrastructure as being 'a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity'.

- 4.23** Green infrastructure supports a range of functions, including recreation and wildlife as well as landscape enhancement. Green infrastructure is essential to enhancing biodiversity by creating and reinforcing habitats and helping to protect against habitat fragmentation. It aids mitigation and adaptation to climate change and provides multiple benefits for human health. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to green infrastructure for people's physical and mental health as well as a place for social activity and local tourism.

- 4.24** The [Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy \(2011\)](#) established a series of strategic green infrastructure areas three of which cover land substantial areas of land within Huntingdonshire: the River Nene, Huntingdonshire Fens and Woods and the Great Ouse. In addition, the Cambridge and surrounding areas strategic green infrastructure area includes the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds a small portion of which falls within the south-eastern part of Huntingdonshire. The Strategy has been supplemented by designation of priority landscape scale nature recovery areas of which four relate closely to Huntingdonshire: the Nene Valley, Great Fen, Great Ouse Valley (this includes Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Grafham Water, Paxton Pits and Ouse Washes) and West Cambridgeshire Hundreds.

- 4.25** Policy 'LP3 Green Infrastructure' of HLP2036 designated four Green Infrastructure Priority Areas (GIPAs) and sets out the strategic approach for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure. The policy is supported by policy 'LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity'. The GIPA's are the Great Fen, Great Ouse Valley, Nene Valley and Grafham Water.

- 4.26** The [Great Fen](#) is a strategic habitat restoration project of national significance. As well as the environmental benefits of the project from its work to restore habitats and the peatland landscape which is important to capture and lock in carbon, it is promoting the eco-tourism sector within the district. Another key aim of the project is to celebrate and preserve the fenland heritage through education and outreach programmes.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 4.27** Additionally, policy HU8 of the Local Plan allocates 27.5ha of land adjacent to Hinchingsbrooke Country Park for green infrastructure. This extension to Hinchingsbrooke Country Park is an important part of the overall strategy to provide strategic green infrastructure alongside development. The allocation will also help to guard against adverse impacts such as increased visitor pressure on designated nature sites arising from development.
- 4.28** The benefits of being able to easily access and use areas of strategic scale green infrastructure and localised areas of green space are well known providing important social benefits to human health and wellbeing as well as opportunities for habitat and biodiversity conservation and enhancement. [Huntingdonshire's Healthy Open Spaces Strategy \(2020\)](#) identified that our communities benefit from a wealth of greenspaces. Across Huntingdonshire there is an average of 87 m<sup>2</sup> of green space per person which is significantly higher than the average across the East of England of 42.75 m<sup>2</sup>. Survey results from the Healthy Open Spaces Strategy indicated that 68% of Huntingdonshire's residents visit a greenspace at least once a fortnight compared to the UK average of 57%.
- 4.29** Additionally, in Huntingdonshire, three open spaces are managed to the Green Flag Award by HDC - Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in Huntingdon, Paxton Pits Nature Reserve in Little Paxton and Priory Park in St Neots, covering an approximately 167ha. The Green Flag Award is the benchmark international standard for publicly accessible parks and green spaces in the United Kingdom. In addition, Grafham Water, which is managed by Anglian Water, holds a Green Flag. In 2022, the St Neots Riverside Miniature Railway were awarded a Green Flag Community Award and the QEII playing fields in Little Paxton were also awarded Green Flag status.

**Hinchingsbrooke Country Park,**



**River Nene under Wansford bridge**



- 4.30** Depending on individual circumstances, planning conditions, obligations, or the Community Infrastructure Levy may all be potential mechanisms for securing and funding green infrastructure. Green infrastructure will require sustainable management and maintenance if it is to provide benefits and services in the long term. Not planning for green infrastructure within new developments and not enhancing existing provision of green space can lead to the degradation of green infrastructure making them less enjoyable to visit and undermine the habitats they provide for wildlife as well as the role they play in addressing climate change.

### Question 26

#### Green infrastructure

How do you think the Local Plan can enhance Huntingdonshire's green infrastructure?

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Issue: Biodiversity net gain

- 4.31** There has been a significant decline in biodiversity for the last hundred years, with damaging implications for future wildlife and humanity. Local authorities in England and Wales have a duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Local plans and planning decisions have the potential to affect biodiversity or geodiversity outside as well as inside relevant designated areas. Therefore, they need to consider the potential impacts of development on protected and priority species, and the scope to avoid or mitigate any impacts when considering site allocations or planning applications.
- 4.32** The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) states that net gain in planning '*describes an approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. Net gain is an umbrella term for both biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gain.*' Biodiversity net gain has been made mandatory by the [Environment Act 2021](#). The Act sets out the following key components to mandatory biodiversity net gain:
- Minimum 10% gain required calculated using Biodiversity Metric (the most recent is [Biodiversity Metric 3.1](#) published by Natural England in April 2022) and approval of a net gain plan
  - Habitat secured for at least 30 years via obligations/ conservation covenant
  - Habitat can be delivered on-site, off-site or via statutory biodiversity credits
  - There will be a national register for net gain delivery sites
  - The mitigation hierarchy still applies of avoidance, mitigation and compensation for biodiversity loss
  - Will also apply to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs)
  - Does not apply to marine development
  - Does not change existing legal environmental and wildlife protections
- 4.33** Linked with the topics of the natural environment, landscape, nature conservation designations and green infrastructure, the Local Plan will need to consider how biodiversity across the district can be protected and enhanced. Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 has policy 'LP30 Biodiversity and Geodiversity' which aims to prevent harm to protected habitats and species, and sites of geological importance, from direct impacts such as land take, and from indirect impacts such as recreational impacts, changes to a watercourse or air pollution and the potential combination of such impacts.
- 4.34** Enhancing biodiversity has become a bigger focus area at the national level, as demonstrated in the now mandatory minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain for all new developments via the Environment Act 2021. Locally, in 2019 [Natural Cambridgeshire](#) set an ambition of doubling nature across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2050. This includes land managed for nature. Within this, it aims to create living landscapes, promote good practice for local food and farming, create better places to live, create sustainable jobs, healthy communities and promote heritage, culture and leisure. Natural Cambridgeshire suggest seeking a 20% biodiversity net gain target.
- 4.35** As explored in the section 'Nature conservation designations', Huntingdonshire has many internationally and nationally designated sites and locally identified sites of habitat and biodiversity value. Together with the green infrastructure found across the district they form an ecological network rich in biodiversity and protected species. These are however facing pressures from climate change, human activity and development. Therefore, the updated local plan must positively balance the need for further development to meet needs while ensuring that the integrity of biodiversity is not compromised but instead can flourish alongside new development.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**Speckled wood butterfly at Monks Wood**



**Woodland with bluebells at Grafham Water**



so setting a target substantially higher than what is mandatory may lead to schemes not providing additional infrastructure and affordable housing in order to meet the biodiversity requirement.

### Question 27

#### Biodiversity net gain

What do you think is the minimum level of biodiversity net gain that the new Local Plan should set?

### Question 28

#### Biodiversity within developments

How can the Local Plan help to increase biodiversity in new developments?

**4.36** To increase biodiversity within new developments specific measures would need to be implemented. These can range from retaining and maximising existing natural features, increasing hedge and shrub planting, increasing tree coverage, incorporating ponds and other wetland features where appropriate and incorporating rewilding. Instead of using hard boundary features such as fences and walls, designing in boundary features such as hedges that form connecting corridors for wildlife rather than barriers could be undertaken, but where walls and fences are needed it is useful to include small holes at ground level so animals such as hedgehogs, reptiles and amphibians can move around a housing development along wildlife corridors. Other measures that can be incorporated into the design of buildings could include bee blocks, bird feeders, insect hotels and bat boxes. These solutions may not be appropriate for all sites and types of developments but offer a selection of some of the measures that can be incorporated into developments to increase biodiversity.

**4.37** It must however be noted that some measures to increase biodiversity within new developments can add to the cost of development which may impact on a scheme's viability. Measures need to be realistic and deliverable

### Issue: Air quality

**4.38** Air quality impacts human health, quality of life, the natural environment and built environment in the short and long term. Pollution can arise from a wide variety of activities and sources, a key source are the emissions from the transport network and industrial activity.

**4.39** Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) can be designated where air pollutant concentrations exceed / are likely to exceed the relevant air quality objectives and are declared for specific pollutants and objectives. A Clean Air Zone (CAZ) defines an area where targeted action is taken to improve air quality. A CAZ is intended to form a proactive response to a clearly



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

defined air quality problem, with actions being focused on reducing air pollution from transport. Local authorities can designate a CAZ in an area of poor air quality which may or may not have an AQMA designation.

- 4.40** The [25 Year Environment Plan](#) sets targets to improve air quality nationally and the [Environment Act 2021](#) establishes a legally binding duty on government to bring forward at least two new air quality targets in secondary legislation by 31 October 2022, this currently delayed. This duty sits within the environmental targets framework outlined in the Environment Act (Part 1).
- 4.41** Air quality across Huntingdonshire is considered to be good, there are however, four AQMAs across the district in Huntingdon, St Neots, Brampton and along the A14 from Hemingford to Fenstanton - identified where the annual mean level of nitrogen dioxide has exceeded 40µg/m<sup>3</sup> (or 40 micrograms per one cubic metre of air). These were designated in 2005 and 2006. The main air quality issues within Huntingdonshire primarily relate to NO<sub>2</sub> (nitrogen dioxide) from vehicle emissions, mostly originating from the strategic road network along the A14 and to a lesser extent the A1. Local traffic and congestion within the market towns also contributes to some elevated levels locally, compared to the rest of the district. The AQMA designations reflect these areas where elevated air pollutants are found.
- 4.42** [HDC's air quality monitoring reports](#) shows that the AQMA objectives have been complied with over the last several years so the Council propose to revoke St Neots, Brampton, and the A14 Hemingford to Fenstanton AQMA's. The Huntingdon AQMA will also be reviewed as its objectives are being met, however due to travel restrictions arising from the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021, it has not yet been possible to fully assess what the impact the re-routing of the A14 has had on air pollution.
- 4.43** Policy 'LP36 Air Pollution' of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 sets out the Council's approach in relation to how development proposals affect and are affected by air quality. It requires that a proposal be accompanied by an Air Quality Assessment where: it is for large scale major development

(development over 200 homes or 2ha of non-residential use); it would potentially conflict with an Air Quality Action Plan; any part of the site is located within 50m of an AQMA or a CAZ; a significant proportion of the traffic generated would go through an AQMA or a CAZ; or any part of the site is located within 100m of a monitoring site where the annual mean level of nitrogen dioxide exceeds 35µg/m<sup>3</sup>.

- 4.44** Policy 'LP16 Sustainable Travel' also expects new developments to contribute to an enhanced transport network that supports an increasing proportion of journeys being undertaken by sustainable travel modes. Policy 'LP17 Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement' supports charging plug-in and other low and ultra-low emissions vehicles. These policies contribute towards a modal shift away towards a more sustainable way of travelling contributing towards bettering air quality. The strategy for development also directs the majority of growth to spatial planning areas that provide the greatest variety and quantity of services, employment and transportation options thus reducing the need to use private cars and maximising sustainable transport and minimising the impact on the highways network.
- 4.45** In Huntingdonshire, while air pollution levels are within local targets, new developments may lead to increased levels of air pollutants particularly development in areas where AQMAs are already in place. The updated local plan can direct development of new homes, employment, schools, services and facilities to areas where active travel modes and public transport are already provided for or can be integrated as part of the development. Also within developments, adequate mitigation needs to be in place so that air pollutant levels do not rise, this can include:
- green infrastructure, in particular trees, where this can create a barrier or maintain separation between sources of pollution and receptors;
  - electric vehicles charging points including rapid charging points;
  - controlling dust and emissions from construction, operation and demolition; and
  - traffic measures and a travel plan that supports sustainable transport modes of transport.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 29

#### Air quality

How can the updated local plan assist in reducing air pollutants and keep pollutants within acceptable levels?

## 5 Supporting our places

- 5.1** Huntingdonshire has a wealth of history and a variety of places making it a sought after place to live, work and enjoy leisure time. This section provides an overview of Huntingdonshire looking at the district's market towns, villages and countryside, identifying the specific issues facing each area and the amount of growth experienced since 2011. The issues for each settlements are locally specific with more general investigation of issues such as housing, the economy and environment covered in other chapters contained within this engagement paper. The historic environment is also included within this section as the vast majority of the district's settlements have historic assets that have shaped their development and local character.
- 5.2** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 pursued a strategy of focusing development in the larger, more sustainable settlements and carefully limiting growth within small villages and the countryside. The vast majority of the Local Plan's growth was focused within the larger settlements and their immediate environs defined as spatial planning areas. These were Huntingdon which also included Brampton, Godmanchester and Alconbury Weald; St Neots which also included Little Paxton; St Ives; and Ramsey which also included Bury. Lower levels of growth were targeted at seven key service centres which were Buckden, Fenstanton, Kimbolton, Sawtry, Somersham, Warboys and Yaxley. No allocations were made in the remaining settlements which were classified as small settlements due to their more limited levels of sustainability and lower access to services and facilities. The growth strategy did however set out a role for a limited amount of sustainable development in contributing to the social and economic sustainability of these settlements and in supporting a thriving rural economy.
- 5.3** Figure 5.1 shows the Key Diagram used in the Local Plan to 2036 illustrating in a broad-brush way the key elements of its strategy. It identifies the settlements of the spatial planning areas and key service centres and the two strategic expansion locations of Alconbury Weald and St Neots East.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**Figure 5.1 Key Diagram from the Local Plan to 2036**



**5.4** As part of the update of the Local Plan and to explore using a revised set of criteria to assess the sustainability of the district's many towns and villages, a proposed **Settlement Hierarchy Methodology** for judging the sustainability of settlements throughout the district has been consulted on. Application of the finalised methodology to all towns and villages in the district will provide assessments to help shape the future development strategy for Huntingdonshire.

### Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy Feedback

**5.5** Feedback from engagement on the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy highlighted the limited recognition of Huntingdonshire as a cohesive place by residents. Overall, people's sense of place and community lay with the particular town or village that they lived or worked in or had another specific connection to. People were keen to balance ambition with retaining what makes the area special indicating a desire to reinforce the sense of local identity of individual places and the district as a whole. Feedback from residents of villages stressed the need for a clear strategy to support thriving rural communities with adequate local services.

### Issue: Huntingdonshire's market towns

**5.6** The market towns of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey offer people the greatest local access to services and facilities within Huntingdonshire and fulfil a significant role as service, employment and transport hubs for their surrounding areas. Each settlement has its own distinctive character and identity which helps to promote a local sense of place. There are often functional, economic and social links between groups of settlements with smaller settlements benefiting from their proximity to larger ones through greater sustainability than they would otherwise have if they were more isolated, equally, the range of services in the towns are also supported by people who live in the settlements that surround them.

**5.7** A brief portrait of each sets out their locational context and key aspects, their relationship with surrounding settlements and the issues facing each area.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 5.8** The landscape and townscape character of each of these settlements has been assessed in more detail within [Huntingdonshire's Landscape and Townscape SPD \(2022\)](#).

### Huntingdon

- 5.9** Huntingdon is located centrally within the district and is also its administrative centre. It is well connected to the strategic road network and the east coast mainline railway. The A141 currently forms a boundary to the town wrapping around it to the north. Huntingdon is a major housing and employment centre and has a good level of provision of community facilities to support local residents and businesses. Brampton, Godmanchester and Alconbury Weald complete the Huntingdon spatial planning area which benefits from a larger supporting population than just the town itself and in turn the residents of Brampton, Godmanchester and Alconbury Weald in particular benefit from the wide range of services and facilities available in Huntingdon.
- 5.10** The Huntingdon Spatial Planning Area has had some 3,013 housing completions since 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2022. Most were in Huntingdon with 808 net completions. The area around the town centre has changed significantly over the last 15 years. Some 713 new homes have been built on Alconbury Weald, this is alongside major new infrastructure, new school, community shop, and approximately 90,000 sqm of business and warehousing units within the Alconbury Weald Enterprise Zone. 809 completions have been in Brampton, mostly from the mixed-use redevelopment of former RAF Brampton. There have been 683 completions in Godmanchester predominantly arising from development at Romans Edge.
- 5.11** Huntingdon's town centre is focused within the confines of the 1970s ring road. Much of the historic core based on the Market Hill and High Street remains largely intact. It has a relatively strong retail sector and is a key shopping centre for the district with a town centre and the Stukeley Road and Huntingdon Retail Parks located outside of the town centres. Parts

of the town centre have undergone redevelopment and regeneration, for example the new Chequers Court retail centre, although there are remaining opportunities for enhancement still such as St Benedict's Court.

**Huntingdon High Street**



**Chequers Court retail units**



- 5.12** Work is underway by the Council to enhance the market towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives. Studies have been commissioned which will result in a 'masterplan' for each town outlining interventions to enhance their vitality and viability. This follows on from previous work on the ['Prospectus for Growth'](#). Baseline reports were completed in 2021 which identified that footfall in Huntingdon is strongly concentrated between 8am and 5pm with most visits lasting 1-2 hours. Also the night-time economy only accounts for around 10% - 12% of total quarterly expenditure, seemingly limited in comparison to the size of the town. Huntingdon has a good leisure offering with the Commemoration Hall in the town centre, One Leisure and cinema located across the town. It is recognised that the majority of the existing office accommodation in Huntingdon is located to the north of the town centre, off the A141, in out of town business parks. There is currently a lack of office accommodation within the town centre.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**5.13** During the autumn of 2022, there was a period of engagement to capture feedback which help develop the [masterplans](#) for each market town. For Huntingdon, projects focused on providing additional residential accommodation in the town centre, providing business workspace, enhancements to the facilities at the Cromwell Museum, redevelopment of the former 99p store facing onto the Market Square, public realm improvements and enhancements to pedestrian accessibility and permeability.

**5.14** Huntingdon is located on the northern valley slopes of the River Great Ouse with the eastern edge of the town having a strong historic association with the river. It is accessible from the A14, which passes around the southern perimeter of the town. The now completed improvement works to the A14 have altered the layout of the town's road network considerably including a bypass, the Views Common and Pathfinder link roads, railway station layout improvements and the removal of the old A14 viaduct. This work has eased congestion on the ring road, improving the tranquillity and lowering pollution levels around the town centre. It has also opened up the landscape to the south of the town and linking it visually with its Great Ouse Valley setting.

**5.15** The A141 around the north of Huntingdon connects westwards to the A14 and A1 at Brampton Hut junction and eastwards to Warboys, Chatteris and onto Wisbech serving as a major route into the Fens. Congestion levels can be high particularly at peak times with road safety issues and lack of safe cycling and walking routes impeding take up of active travel options. The CPCA are working on a strategic transport project to deliver an improvement scheme around the north of Huntingdon to reduce congestion and delays on the A141, the project also seeks improvements to the St Ives transport network. Following engagement and assessment of options, three packages of improvement works have been compiled by the CPCA for further assessment. This work would be expected to last 24 months, further details can be found on the CPCA's [A141 project page](#).

**5.16** The town has several established employment areas with a concentration of businesses along St Peter's Road either side of the railway line, along Stukeley Road and Ermine Road either side of the A141. The road network forms a major physical boundary to these sites as well as adjoining residential areas. Continuing the vitality of these employment areas is a priority as many people who work here live within accessible walking and cycling distances nearby. Many units, particularly along St Peter's Road are undergoing modernisation and redevelopment revitalising these areas and making units adaptable to changing business needs. However expansion of businesses in this area also highlights some issues around the physical constraints of employment areas with few plots available for very large units. This may result in businesses looking to relocate out of the established employment areas to where more land is available to expand which can undermine the vitality of the area by increasing vacancy rates. The relocation of businesses can also pose a problem for residents who live nearby especially if the businesses relocates to locations with less accessibility particularly by sustainable travel modes.

**Tower Close, St Peter's Road**



**Hinchingbrooke Business Park unit**





## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 30

#### Issues for Huntingdon and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to Huntingdon, Alconbury Weald, Brampton or Godmanchester, what do you like most about the settlement(s)?

### Question 31

#### Priorities for Huntingdon and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to Huntingdon, Alconbury Weald, Brampton or Godmanchester, what are the issues of greatest concern or priority?

the current spatial planning area due to its close relationship with the town. It lies approximately 1km north of St Neots and has retained its own separate identity due to open river floodplains acting as a landscape gap.

**5.19** St Neots straddles the River Great Ouse. The valley narrows as it passes through the historic heart of the town where it provides the setting to a number of historic buildings along the eastern river bank. Within the town a single crossing of the river at Town Bridge connects the two urban areas and provides a gateway into the historic core of the town. Adjoining this is Riverside Park, some 29 hectares of land used for recreation and leisure. This riverside location however brings with it increased risk of flooding. As a result of climate change, there is increased levels of rainfall which can oversaturate the ground and overwhelm rivers and infrastructure leading to flooding events.

**5.20** The town centre has a rich history but its historical layout and proximity to the river mean that in places the town centre is challenging to navigate and the traffic on the busy High Street can reduce the quality of people's experiences. Although the town is growing, there has been a reduction in footfall in the town centre resulting in a weakened retail and leisure sector where businesses are unable to take full advantage of the town's growth and location. To improve the town centre, the Council has secured funding from the Government's [Future High Streets Fund](#). £12.8 million is anticipated to be invested in the town centre to transform it for the benefit of local people, businesses, and visitors. Construction on projects is expected to commence in 2023, completing by 2025.

### St Neots

**5.17** St Neots is, in population terms, the largest settlement in the district. The smaller and previously independent settlements of Eaton Socon, Eaton Ford and Eynesbury to the south and west have been assimilated into the urban fabric of St Neots.

**5.18** It is located to the south of the district adjoining Bedfordshire. The town is well placed in terms of connections to the strategic transport network as it has direct access on to the A1, is connected to Cambridge via the A428, and has a railway station with services to Peterborough, Stevenage and London via the east coast mainline railway. This location means attracting retail, leisure and employment development to St Neots is challenging due to competition from Bedford and Cambridge. Little Paxton is also part of



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**St Neots Riverside Park**



**St Neots market square**



located to the east of the railway line which completed its final homes in 2018. South of Loves Farm is Wintringham Park, an urban extension of 2,800 homes, construction is underway with a new school built and now some 131 dwellings completed. The proximity of housing in this location next to the railway station is particularly ideal for commuters who work in Stevenage and London risking parts of St Neots becoming a dormitory town.

**Station Square in Loves Farm**



**Loves Farm shops**



**5.21** As well as the town centre, St Neots has several other employment locations in the south of the town and in the east along Cromwell Road. Extensions and alterations have been made to units over time, some major redevelopments have taken place to upgrade buildings and provide units that meet current business needs and units that are more energy efficient. The future of these industrial estates is a key issue with consideration on how they are rejuvenated going forward to be fit for modern employment uses. Additionally, like the industrial estates within Huntingdon, the location of employment sites is heavy constrained by the road network and by adjoining residential development, leaving limited opportunities for further major development and pressure that parts of the estates be redeveloped for housing. This may lead to a rise in businesses relocating to where larger units can be accommodated either on the edge of the town, elsewhere in Huntingdonshire or in neighbouring authority areas.

**5.22** The St Neots Spatial Planning Area has had 1,881 net housing completions between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2022. The majority of this (1,432) have been in St Neots with 449 in Little Paxton. These completions in Little Paxton were from the redevelopment of the riverside mill in the first half of this ten year period and now the development at Riversfield for 199 dwellings. The vast majority of St Neots' completions were on Loves Farm

**5.23** The proposed East-West Rail is a major rail infrastructure project which aspires to provide a train service from Oxford to Cambridge via Milton Keynes and Bedford. In 2021, a [public consultation](#) on five route alignments within the preferred route option area was undertaken with the feedback from this consultation being reviewed by the East West Rail Company. The options included a new station in the area near Tempsford or south of St Neots, which could connect East West Rail with the East Coast Main Line. This strategic infrastructure project not only will provide the potential for faster and easier connections between places, it has the potential to boost housing and economic growth along its corridor where new homes and businesses could be located. For Huntingdonshire, this could mean development within the district's own boundaries as well as in neighbouring authorities.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 5.24** While there is still uncertainty on whether the project will go ahead at all and if so what the exact location will be of a new station and the alignment of the railway line. If the railway line does go ahead there is potential for pressure for cumulative development along the corridor including for land around St Neots and immediately south within Bedfordshire. This could give rise to several issues, ranging from the impact of new communities on the character and identity of the town; the risk of coalescence forming large urban landscapes; the impact on flooding within the town as well as further downstream; the environmental impacts of major development including on the Great Ouse Valley and on air pollution. Pressure may be placed on existing services and facilities and there may be increased competition for employment and retail land. The potential railway route could however also bring an increased choice of homes and enhanced access to more diverse employment, education, shopping and leisure opportunities.
- 5.25** Upgrades to the A428 between the Black Cat roundabout on the A1 and the Caxton Gibbet roundabout at the junction of the A428 with the A1198 were approved in August 2022 although a legal challenge has since been lodged. This is a focal point for traffic congestion regularly affecting people travelling between St Neots and Cambridge. Proposed improvements include provision of a 10 mile stretch of dual carriageway, a three tier junction at the Black Cat roundabout to allow traffic to flow freely on the A1 and new junctions at Caxton Gibbet and at Cambridge Road St Neots to connect the proposed route to the existing A428. Intended works also include new bridges over the River Great Ouse and East Coast mainline railway and improved routes for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders that connect with existing public rights of way.

### Question 32

#### Relationship with Bedford and Cambridge

How can the Local Plan support St Neots in developing a complementary relationship with Bedford and Cambridge

### Question 33

#### Issues for St Neots and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to St Neots or Little Paxton, what do you like most about the settlement(s)?

### Question 34

#### Priorities for St Neots and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to St Neots or Little Paxton, what are the issues of greatest concern or priority?

### St Ives

- 5.26** St Ives is located towards the east of the district. It is a historic market town situated on the northern bank of the River Great Ouse. There are good visual and physical links between the historic centre and the river, which provides a distinctive and high quality setting to the town. It is well connected

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

to the strategic transport network with connections to the A1307/A14 and Cambridge via the A1096 and to Huntingdon via the A1123 (Houghton Road), which cuts straight through the settlement providing a secondary node at the junction with Ramsey Road. Marley Road, the B1040 Somersham Road and the A1096 create clearly defined edges to the north, east and south east of the town although some development such as Compass Point and Morrisons has occurred to the east of the road.

**5.27** The St Ives Spatial Planning Area has had 846 housing completions since 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2022 consisting of major new developments, change of uses and several redevelopments. The majority of these completions have been on the former Jewsons site along London Road (within Hemingford Grey parish) and completions on the western edge of the town north and south of the A1123 including the Garner Drive and The Spires developments. The latter is part of a wider site allocation (SI1 St Ives West) in the current local plan which includes the redevelopment of Houghton Grange that has already started. Non-residential development has consisted of the Abbey Retail Park by the junction of the A1123 and A1096 providing several fast food outlets and drive thrus, several major developments consisting of new industrial workshops within the Somersham Road Industrial Estate, and several change of uses within the town centre.

**5.28** The CPCA are working on a strategic transport solution seeking to address the congestion on the A141 and the St Ives highway network, particularly the A1096 and its junction with the A1123 and B1040. Congestion levels can be high particularly at peak times with road safety issues and lack of safe cycling and walking routes impeding take up of active travel options. Options for potential improvements were published for consultation in 2021. Overall, respondents most favoured a combination of a full offline bypass with no connections from A141 to A1123 and local junction improvement package. Following engagement and assessment of options, three packages of improvement works have been compiled by the CPCA for further assessment. This work is expected to last about two years, further details can be found on the CPCA's [A141 project page](#).

**5.29** The Great Ouse Valley dominates the southern side of the town with its wide flat floodplain, traditional water meadows, woodlands, willow trees and the lakes occupying former gravel pits all coupled with the River Great Ouse itself providing the landscape setting to the historic part of the town. The Ouse Valley Way long distance footpath runs alongside or close to the river providing opportunities for people to interact with the wider landscape and connects St Ives with neighbouring villages and communities, namely Houghton & Wyton, the Hemingfords and Huntingdon. This walk includes the historic Houghton Mill, a key local tourist attraction. To the north, the landscape is more undulating typified by large fields and mature vegetation.

**River Great Ouse from St Ives bridge**



**5.30** The historic core of the town developed around the bridge over the River Great Ouse, and along the northern bank of the river. It is a picturesque town with the Quayside looking over the River Great Ouse. As such it is a popular destination for tourists and visitors with a well-used guided busway to Cambridge. There are a number of small independent hotel and bed & breakfast operators within St Ives and the town has developed an extensive base of small specialist independent shops. Examples are located in Crown Street, Merrylands, The Broadway and The Waits.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 5.31** Work is underway by the Council to enhance the market towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives, studies have been commissioned which will result in a 'masterplan' for the towns outlining interventions to enhance their vitality and viability. This follows on from previous work on the '[Prospectus for Growth](#)'. Baseline reports were completed in 2021, they identified that footfall in St Ives is primarily concentrated between 8am and 5pm but the evening economy accounted for 20% of daily spend in 2020 Q3. They also noted that retail spend relies significantly on attracting residents from other towns and visitors to the area. It appears that St Ives' evening economy managed to bounce back relatively well from Covid restrictions.
- 5.32** During the autumn of 2022, there was a period of engagement to capture feedback which help develop the [masterplans](#) for each market town. For St Ives, projects focused on providing public realm improvements along the riverside and in the centre of the town, conversion of the former Barclays building for managed workspace/café, a new incubator hub, new apartments with live/work units, and a new market, works space and learning centre.

**St Ives town centre**



**St Ives Quayside**



- 5.33** The town has grown asymmetrically to the north of the river with much late 20th century development to the north of the town centre some distance from the town centre. The extensive floodplain to the south has been retained as open land. The location of future development will be heavily dependent on the risk of flooding. As a result of climate change, there are likely to be increased challenges from flood risk in determining where future development may be located.
- 5.34** Employment opportunities are focussed within the eastern part of the town. Other employment areas consist of workshops and warehousing units in more industrial areas such as the Somersham Road and Marley Road Industrial Estates are located on the eastern and northern edges of the town respectively. Also on this eastern edge is the Abbey Retail Park by the junction of the A1123 and A1096 providing several fast food outlets and drive thrus. The majority of existing office accommodation in St Ives is located north-east of the town centre in out-of-town business parks such as Compass Point Business Park. There is currently a lack of office accommodation within the town centre, with the majority of the existing office accommodation within the town being provided in older buildings.
- 5.35** The accessibility of these employment opportunities can be challenging particularly with limited cycle and walkways along Marley Road meaning longer and less direct routes on foot or bicycle can be required adding to the journey time and encouraging car usage which contributes towards congestion on the road network.

### Question 35

#### Relationship with Cambridge

How can the Local Plan support St Ives in developing a complementary relationship with Cambridge?



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 36

#### Issues for St Ives and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to St Ives, what do you like most about the settlement?

### Question 37

#### Priorities for St Ives and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to St Ives, what are the issues of greatest concern or priority?

### Ramsey

**5.36** Ramsey is located on the edge of the fenland landscape and is connected by water to the wider Fens area to the north and west. The Fens extends north and east into surrounding districts. The original settlement focused around Ramsey Abbey and has extended over time southwards now forming a continuous townscape with much of the village of Bury (a separate parish), although part of Bury around Holy Cross church remains separate. The buildings of former RAF Upwood largely fall within Bury parish and form part of the continuous form of development from Ramsey. However, Ramsey town and Bury village have retained distinct characters and to a great extent varying identities but there are strong functional, economic and social links between them. The town is a source of employment, services and facilities not only for Ramsey and Bury residents but also for a vast hinterland which includes Ramsey St Mary's, Ramsey Forty Foot, Ramsey Heights, Wistow and Upwood.

**5.37** The Ramsey Spatial Planning Area has had 485 housing completions between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2022. 338 of these have been within Ramsey and 147 in Bury. Major developments to have taken place include the redevelopment of the former clinic at RAF Upwood in Bury and extension from Field Road and major schemes around High Lode and Stocking Fen in the north of the town. As well residential, the most notable non-residential completions include a new Tesco superstore and development within the Established Employment Area Upwood Air Park.

**Cades Close, redevelopment off Great Whyte, Ramsey**



**New homes on the former RAF Upwood clinic site, Bury**



**5.38** Transport connections from Ramsey to the surrounding area primarily include narrow local roads, with the B1040 providing the 7kms connection between the town centre and the A141 connecting to Huntingdon and then on to the A1 providing strategic connections to the north and south. In comparison to the other market towns in Huntingdonshire, Ramsey has limited public transport and active transport routes and consequently there is a greater reliance on private vehicles. There is limited pedestrian / cycle priority space, no national cycle routes or informal cycle routes connecting Ramsey to the wider area. Ramsey is connected to the Fens system of watercourses, however there is limited opportunity to moor, with the nearest marina approximately 1km away at Bill Fen. Creating more



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

opportunities for walking and cycling routes as well as public transport options could improve opportunities for sustainable travel and employment options.

- 5.39** There is limited access to ultra-fast broadband and 4G mobile connections for residents and businesses which constrain some activities, including working from home opportunities. Improvements could reduce the need to travel outside of Ramsey leading to several co-benefits whereby more people living in Ramsey and working from home would spend more time within the town with greater opportunities to support local shops and businesses.
- 5.40** Work is underway by the Council to enhance the market towns of Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Ives, studies have been commissioned which will result in a 'masterplan' for the towns outlining interventions to enhance their vitality and viability. This follows on from previous work on the ['Prospectus for Growth'](#). Baseline reports were completed in 2021, they identified that Ramsey's night-time economy is very small, and that approximately 70% of spend in the town centre comes from people residing within 10km of it. This was highlighted by the low level of change between spend profiles throughout the day during the COVID-19 lockdown periods. People typically spend a short time in the town centre, with around 72% of visits being under 1 hour in length. A higher portion of visits to Ramsey are for shopping for essentials and running errands (72% combined) compared to other towns in Huntingdonshire. The report also found that there is limited office space within Ramsey. The high levels of out-commuting from Ramsey to neighbouring larger towns and Peterborough again indicate the importance of connecting the town to other employment sites.
- 5.41** During the autumn of 2022, there was a period of engagement to capture feedback which help develop the [masterplans](#) for each market town. For Ramsey, projects focused on providing cycle and digital connections, public

realm improvements to Great Whyte, enhancements of pedestrian permeability and accessibility, new business/work space and learning centre, new residential units and moorings.

- 5.42** The town has a reasonable recreation and leisure offer, with the north eastern edges of Ramsey containing largely recreational uses, a leisure centre, cemetery and Ramsey Rural Museum which give the area a relatively open, green character forming an effective transition from the town to the surrounding countryside. Public rights of way extend out of this area into the Fenland landscape. Further round to the east the edge of Ramsey running down to the eastern edge of Bury is dominated by the open green landscape formed by Ramsey golf course which includes a two mile waterway trail. To the north is the Great Fen, a strategic habitat restoration project of national significance. This is promoting the eco-tourism sector within the district and may boost the local economy around Ramsey. Another key aim of the project is to celebrate and preserve the fenland heritage through education and outreach programmes.
- 5.43** Ramsey is heavily influenced by the surrounding landscape and its agricultural links with the peaty soils being a rare and nationally important environment for food production and within the climate change agenda. Parts of Ramsey are at a considerable risk of flooding, although the town is located within a managed system with several drainage boards.
- 5.44** The wider landscape provides Ramsey with a strong sense of place but is is vulnerable to change. Given its flat nature long distance views can be gained across the landscape from the edge of the town in many places, field boundary hedges and trees and agricultural buildings being the most common vertical features. There are several renewable energy installations around Ramsey, to the north are wind turbines that can be seen from many angles and to the west is the Biggin Lane solar farm. The impacts of climate change may be particularly severe due to increased variability in water levels and higher temperatures affecting the peat including its depletion exposing the underlying clay which is far less fertile and gives rise to the need for different agricultural practices.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Ramsey historic centre Jubilee clock



Expansive views across the Fens



### Question 38

#### Ramsey's relationship with nearby urban areas

How can the Local Plan support Ramsey in developing a positive relationship with Huntingdon and Peterborough?

### Question 39

#### Issues for Ramsey and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to Ramsey or Bury, what do you like most about the settlement(s)?

### Question 40

#### Priorities for Ramsey and surrounding areas

If you live, work or have any other connections to Ramsey or Bury, what are the issues of greatest concern or priority?

### Issue: Huntingdonshire's villages

- 5.45** Much of Huntingdonshire's character is provided by its extensive rural area, numerous dispersed settlements which are attractive places to live, work and visit, and its high quality historic and natural environment. The level of services and facilities available in villages varies significantly with the largest supporting a primary school, shops and public hall but the smallest having no service provision at all.
- 5.46** Huntingdonshire's villages have all grown and developed in differing ways based on natural and human influences over many centuries. Significant variations in character exist within the settlements themselves, reflecting their differing evolution and contributing to each village and hamlet's unique sense of place, although many may share similar characteristics and developmental patterns.
- 5.47** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 identified seven villages as key service centres, these offer a range of services and facilities to meet the daily needs of their residents. These are Buckden, Fenstanton, Kimbolton, Sawtry, Somersham, Warboys and Yaxley. Allocations were made in these villages for some 1,655 new homes across these villages to contribute to their social and economic sustainability and help support a thriving rural economy around them.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 5.48** There have been 1,407 completions in key service centres in the 11 year period between 2011 and 2022. This represents a 11% increase in the dwelling stock when compared to the 2011 census (12,590). At the time of writing, not all site allocations had acquired planning approval, others are under construction and some have completed which explains in part the variations in net completions across these villages when compared to the percentage change from the 2011 dwelling stock level. Additionally, allocations of housing in key service centres was not uniform but instead varied based on the sustainability of each settlement and the suitability of sites put forward for development. Some have also had additional sites receive planning approval that were not allocated.

**Kimbolton High Street**



**Yaxley's Broadway shopping centre**



- 5.49** Settlements not categorised as either being within a spatial planning area or key service centre were identified as small settlements. No site allocations were made within these. Instead, policies allow for some growth to facilitate appropriate opportunities for villages to grow organically and to support a living, working countryside capable of adapting to changing needs. Policies that support this are 'LP19 Rural Economy', 'LP22 Local Services and Community Facilities', 'LP23 Tourism and Recreation', 'LP28 Rural Exceptions Housing', 'LP33 Rural Buildings' and 'LP38 Water Related Development'.

- 5.50** Some organic growth in small settlements helps to create a more balanced and diverse local population; enabling young people to stay in the communities they grew up in; and providing opportunities for older people seeking to move into more accessible housing within the community. It can also help sustain the available services and facilities by maintaining population numbers helping to address the particular challenge of declining rural populations relating to falling household sizes.

- 5.51** The variety of settlements across the district means that what may be a sustainable level of development in one settlement may be unsustainable in another. Therefore, the acceptable amount of development in these settlements is a balanced judgement between the sustainability of the individual settlement overall considering the level of service and infrastructure provision available, the locational relationship of the proposed development site with local services, and the impact of the proposed amount of development on the character of the immediate locality and of the settlement as a whole.

- 5.52** There have been 909 completions in small settlements in the 11 year period between 2011 and 2022. This represents a 5% increase in the dwelling stock when compared to the 2011 census (17,800). Some of the smallest of Huntingdonshire's settlements have had no completions since 2011. Almost three quarters of these completions have been on minor scale proposals of up to 10 dwellings, these range from edge of settlement developments, infill developments, change of uses and conversions.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Dutton Gardens, Great Gransden



Howgate Grove, Colne



- 5.53** You may find the following issues of particular interest: 'Issue: Huntingdonshire's landscapes', 'Issue: The natural environment and nature conservation designations', 'Issue: Enhancing tourism', 'Issue: Public transport and active travel infrastructure', and 'Issue: Community facilities and services'.

### Question 41

#### Issues for Huntingdonshire's Villages

If you live, work or have other connections to one or more of Huntingdonshire's villages please name it/them and say what you like most about it/them.

### Question 42

#### Priorities for Huntingdonshire's villages

If you live, work or have other connections to one or more of Huntingdonshire's villages please name it/them and say what are the issues of greatest concern or priority.

### Issue: The countryside

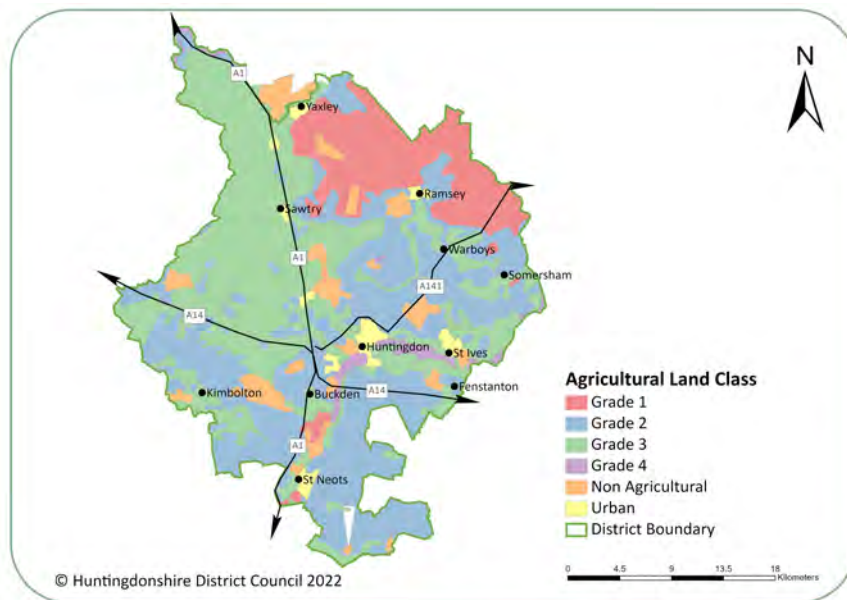
- 5.54** Huntingdonshire is an extensive rural district, the countryside occupies a large area and includes substantial areas of high quality agricultural land and important wildlife habitats.
- 5.55** The countryside is strongly shaped by the agricultural heritage of the district. Large swathes comprise high quality agricultural land predominantly used for arable crops. The north east of Huntingdonshire is heavily influenced by the fen landscape forming a strong contrast to the west which is dominated by gently rolling claylands with more wooded areas with Grafham Water and the Kym valley adding to the landscape character. The valley of the River Great Ouse dominates the landscape of the central and eastern parts of the district being an attractive landscape with a particular sense of enclosure and tranquillity providing many opportunities for quiet recreational use. Detailed assessments of the landscape character of the district can be found in [Huntingdonshire's Landscape and Townscape SPD \(2022\)](#).
- 5.56** Map 5.1 shows the distribution of agricultural land grades across the district. Grade 1 land is the best and most versatile agricultural land which predominates in the north east of the district where fenland peat is found. Much of the western and southern parts of the district comprises grade 2 agricultural land which is also highly productive; the only exceptions to this are mainly found along the Great Ouse Valley and a belt of grade 3 land broadly running east from Woodwalton to Warboys and on to Somersham.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

The majority of the north west of Huntingdonshire comprises grade 3 agricultural land within which elements of grade 3a land are still classified as best and most versatile and so forming valuable productive agricultural land.

**Map 5.1 Agricultural Land Class across Huntingdonshire**



- 5.57** Huntingdonshire is well located in relation to the strategic transport network with road, rail and bus connections. However, connectivity amongst the large rural areas of the district is limited as is ultra-fast broadband, which incentivise private car usage and may discourage people living or working in more rural areas. Therefore, a balance needs to be struck between supporting a thriving rural economy and providing opportunities for

communities to achieve local development aspirations, with protecting the character of existing settlements and recognising the character and beauty of the surrounding countryside.

- 5.58** Huntingdonshire's countryside plays an important role within Huntingdonshire's modest tourism sector. Due to the abundance of wildlife sites, strategic green infrastructure areas and variety of landscapes found across the district, Huntingdonshire's tourism sector is primarily nature and conservation based with opportunities to enjoy the wildlife and undertake leisure pursuits such as walking, cycling and water based activities alongside the district's historic built environment.
- 5.59** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 identifies that there are specific opportunities for sustainable development in the countryside. Policy 'LP10 The Countryside' requires that development avoid the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land and demonstrate and avoid use of grade one agricultural land, recognise the intrinsic character of the countryside and not adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others. The policy works alongside policies 'LP19 Rural Economy', 'LP22 Local Services and Community Facilities', 'LP23 Tourism and Recreation', 'LP28 Rural Exceptions Housing', 'LP33 Rural Buildings' and 'LP38 Water Related Development'. These set out the specific opportunities whereby development in countryside locations may be supported to support a thriving economy while protecting the character of existing settlements and recognising the intrinsic character of the surrounding countryside.
- 5.60** You may find the following issues of particular interest: 'Issue: Huntingdonshire's landscapes', 'Issue: The natural environment and nature conservation designations', 'Issue: Rural economy and agriculture', 'Issue: Enhancing tourism', 'Issue: Public transport and active travel infrastructure', and 'Issue: Utilities and digital infrastructure'.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 43

#### Issues for Huntingdonshire's Countryside

If you live, work or have other connections to Huntingdonshire's countryside please name whereabouts and say what you like most about it.

### Question 44

#### Priorities for Huntingdonshire's Countryside

If you live, work or have other connections to Huntingdonshire's countryside please name whereabouts and say what are the issues of greatest concern or priority.

### Issue: Historic environment

**5.61** The historic environment is an important part of understanding the history of people and places. It contributes towards people's quality of life, the enjoyment of visitors to an area and to the local economy. Heritage also plays an important part in understanding an area's character and a starting point in creating good quality design that reflects local character. It is an irreplaceable resource facing pressures such as the impacts of development, changing uses of historic buildings and climate change. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 is the key legal framework for the historic environment.

**5.62** The NPPF defines heritage assets as being 'a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).' They can have historical, architectural, archaeological and cultural interest and value that have a degree of significance to existing and future generations. Significance derives from a heritage asset's presence and its setting.

**5.63** Huntingdonshire has a rich history and this is reflected in the large number of heritage assets found within the district. At the time of writing there were 2,216 listed buildings, 5 registered parks and gardens, 61 conservation areas and 84 scheduled monuments. There are also many non-designated heritage assets across the district and the potential for as yet undiscovered archaeology.

**5.64** National policy and guidance says that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment. In developing a strategy, specific opportunities for the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets, including their settings should be identified. This could include, the delivery of development that will make a positive contribution to, or better reveal the significance of, the heritage asset, or reflect and enhance local character and distinctiveness with particular regard given to the prevailing styles of design and use of materials in a local area. Specific policies such as design and site allocations can be developed to deliver this strategy.

**5.65** The [Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036](#) includes a 'Heritage Strategy' (pages 119-120). It is complemented by policy 'LP34 Heritage Assets and their Setting'. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that development proposals protect and conserve the district's heritage assets and where possible enhance them and their settings.

**5.66** The historic environment plays an important role in placemaking. Policy 'LP11 Design Context' sets out the mechanisms for achieving high standards of design. It requires that the guidance within the [Landscape and Townscape](#)

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

[SPD \(2022\)](#) , [Design Guide \(2017\)](#) and where appropriate [Conservation Area Documents](#) be used to ensure that proposals relate positively to their context. These documents provide further details and assessment on how the historic environment has shaped the character of settlements and how development should take inspiration from this to help conserve heritage assets and their settings. Additionally, criteria a. and b. of policy 'LP12 Design Implementation' requires proposals to respond to their context.

- 5.67** All of Huntingdonshire's market towns and many villages have a conservation area designation reflecting their historic value, many buildings within them are listed and used as cafes, shops, restaurants and community uses to support the local economy as well as people's homes. The abundance of historic buildings and structures found across the district, as well as villages that have retained their historic form and historic landscapes, monuments and registered parks and gardens play a significant part in Huntingdonshire's small tourism sector. The use of heritage assets to support a vibrant local economy can contribute towards their conservation and enjoyment by the public.
- 5.68** From time to time, works to heritage assets are necessary to conserve their significance and where possible enhance them. However, development to heritage assets may also harm their significance and result in assets being put at risk. This is also the case for assets that are left to decay or are left derelict. Over time, this can lead to an erosion of the historical, architectural and cultural value of not just individual structures but the nearby historic environments such as other listed buildings or a conservation areas.
- 5.69** Overarchingly, the climate emergency poses significant risks to the historic environment, including but not limited to:
- The preservation of archaeology in situ may become more challenging due to extremes in temperature and wetting and drying. Wetland sites that preserve organic material in anaerobic (oxygen free) environments such as peatland are particularly vulnerable.
  - Flooding and storm events may cause physical damage to heritage assets such as buildings and bridges.

- Water damage to historic buildings arising from flooding events.
- Temperature changes may encourage fungal and plant growth and insect infestation in historic building materials which may lead to structural problems and health issues for occupants.
- Soil shrinkage may lead to building subsidence.

- 5.70** Retrofitting and energy efficiency measures, while responding to climate change concerns, may harm the significance of heritage assets. However, works may be needed for the health benefits of occupiers of the buildings or to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the property.

### Question 45

#### Priorities for Huntingdonshire's Historic Environment

What do you think the priorities should be for protecting Huntingdonshire's historic environment?

### Question 46

#### Other Historic environment issues

Are there any other issues that should be raised in regards to the historic environment that the Local Plan could seek to address?

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 6 Meeting the housing needs of all

- 6.1** Having a safe, secure and affordable home is a basic necessity that provides shelter and supports a person's health, well-being and independence. Collectively, homes that meet people's needs help to build thriving sustainable communities where residents can experience a high quality of life.
- 6.2** A key role of the Local Plan is to provide a strategy for meeting Huntingdonshire's housing needs in terms of the quantity, size, type and tenure of new homes. It will aim to ensure that the housing needs of all types of households are provided for. Housing is often seen as the crux of a Local Plan as proposals for new housing growth can have direct impacts on existing communities. However, housing is just one element of many that go towards making up sustainable communities and assisting people in having a high quality of life.
- 6.3** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 allocated sufficient housing land to fully meet the identified need for an additional 20,100 new homes between 2011 and 2036. In total 8,571 new homes were built in Huntingdonshire in the 11 years between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2022. This included two major new developments. Alconbury Weald to the north west of Huntingdon was allocated for 5,000 new homes alongside the 150 ha enterprise zone; by the end of March 2022 713 homes were completed. To the east of St Neots 3,820 new homes were allocated across the second phase of Loves Farm and Wintringham Park; by the end of March 2022 131 homes were completed on Wintringham Park with Loves Farm phase 2 yet to start. The Local Plan to 2036 has a total of 50 allocated sites for new homes; by 31 March 2022 well over half of these had started being built. The next Local Plan will see the continuation of sites already started and review the development prospects of those allocated which have not yet started.

- 6.4** This chapter focuses on the details of the number and nature of new homes needed in the district for all members of our communities. Issues relating to where the new homes should be built are covered in chapter 9 'Distributing new growth'. Housing is a key topic of government interest which is reflected in the level of guidelines provided.

#### Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy Feedback

- 6.5** Feedback from engagement on the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy highlighted concerns over the need for new homes to be supported by new infrastructure, facilities and support services to help generate communities. Whilst some resistance to more homes being built was expressed others appreciated the need for more homes. Concerns were also put forward about the types of homes being built and the desirability of the sizes and cost of new homes being shaped by local needs and preferences.

#### Issue: The need for new homes

- 6.6** The need for new homes has many roots. The simplest is when population growth occurs from births exceeding deaths. However, there are many other factors giving rise to the need for new homes. With increasing average lifespans, established households retain the need for properties longer. Average household size is declining so more properties will be needed simply to accommodate the same number of people in future. New households can form either from breakdown of existing joint households or establishment of a separate household for the first time. People may seek to move to be close to family, take up a new job or change their lifestyle. The lack of sufficient suitable housing can lead to high prices, affordability challenges, overcrowding, increased levels of homelessness, and reduced labour mobility and availability resulting in difficulties in staff recruitment for businesses.
- 6.7** The government is committed to significantly increasing the supply of new homes with the ambition to be delivering 300,000 new homes a year throughout England on average by the mid-2020s across all tenures.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Housing under construction at Wintringham Park St Neots



annually and will be fixed at a point when the Local Plan is nearing completion. The box below shows the calculation based on the most up-to-date figures available at the time of writing. This would represent an uplift of 18% over the target growth rate in the current Local Plan.

#### Huntingdonshire's Standard Method Housing Calculation

Number of households in 2022 = 78,758

Number of households projected in 2032 = 85,791

Total projected household growth = 7,033

Annual projected growth = 703.3

Local median workplace based affordability ratio = 9.62

Adjustment factor =  $((9.62-4)/4) \times 0.25 + 1 = 1.351$

Standard method outcome =  $703.3 \times 1.351 = \mathbf{950 \text{ new homes needed per year}}$

- 6.8** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 has an annual housing target of 804 new homes per year, based on an overall target of 20,100 new homes across its 25 year lifespan. By 31st March 2022 8,517 new homes had been completed in the 11 years from 2011, the equivalent of 774 per year. 1,261 new homes were under construction and planning permission had been granted for 10,633 more which had not yet been started.
- 6.9** The starting point for the number of homes required must be informed by the Government's ['standard method'](#). This is a nationally set formula which identifies the minimum number of homes that the Local Plan will be expected to plan for. It is calculated using national household projections and makes allowance for any historic under-supply. It also aims to address housing affordability by applying an adjustment factor based on local median workplace based affordability ratios which are updated in March each year.<sup>(6)</sup>
- 6.10** In addition, local authorities who cannot accommodate their own needs due to fundamental constraints, can ask that some of their housing need be accommodated in other nearby areas. The housing number is updated

- 6.11** The number of people who live in each household is changing which contributes to generating the need for additional homes. The Office for National Statistics [household projections](#) indicate that in 2018 the average household in Huntingdonshire contained 2.36 people. This is predicted to drop to 2.25 people in 2033 and 2.20 people in 2043. As a result, approximately 4,150 additional homes will be required in Huntingdonshire simply to meet the needs of the existing population by 2043 without allowing for any population growth.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 6.12** It will be expected that the Local Authority should test the minimum homes figure taking into account other factors such as: planned employment growth; changes in demographic behaviour; strategic infrastructure improvements; need for affordable homes; and need from neighbouring authorities. Without assessing these additional factors that influence housing need in the district the Local Plan may not provide sufficient housing for workers, businesses, future residents and first time buyers. This could have numerous social, environmental and economic impacts such as increased commuting leading to higher pollution levels and repercussions for climate change, increased house prices and lack of available labour for existing and growing businesses. There is also the risk that despite best efforts on behalf of the Council and intentions of the landowner of a site that circumstances change and sites which are allocated for development are not brought forward in the end.
- 6.13** 'Issue: Housing tenures' considers the need for affordable homes in more detail. The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups \(2021\)](#) indicates in table 33 that there is a current unfulfilled need for affordable homes from some 1,230 households. The Housing Register contained around 2,600 households in July 2022. Some of these households will be seeking to access affordable housing for the first time, others will already be living in affordable homes but need alternative properties better suited to their current needs and building new homes meeting their needs would free up existing properties for other people. Based on policies in Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 all sites of 10 or more new homes are expected to provide 40% of those properties as affordable homes. If a similar proportion were taken forward in the next Local Plan it would mean that for every additional 100 homes allocated above the baseline standard method number up to an extra 40 affordable homes could be built.

### Question 47

#### Number of additional homes to be sought

What factors do you think could justify increasing the housing target above the standard method figure for Huntingdonshire?

### Issue: Delivery of new homes

- 6.14** As of April 2022, Huntingdonshire had around 80,020 homes with just over 70% of these being owner occupied, 14% being privately rented and just under 13% being social rented. As already highlighted, the household size in Huntingdonshire is expected to drop. The decrease in household size means that more homes are needed to accommodate the same number of people.
- 6.15** The Local Plan provides the opportunity to promote the delivery of new homes. New homes are needed though not just to provide sufficient numbers of homes for the expected numbers of residents. The Local Plan is also an opportunity to set out proactive policies to shape the nature, tenure, accessibility and environmental standards of these new homes.
- 6.16** It is important to have realistic expectations about what can be achieved through the planning system and to decide on priorities to ensure that new development is actually delivered and is sustainable to live in for the longer term. Construction of high quality

**New homes at Wagstaffe Close Ramsey completed in 2019**





## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

new developments with the necessary services and infrastructure to meet the needs of future residents may be desirable. The financial viability of any development and its accompanying infrastructure is influenced by many factors such as the cost of construction, the value of the land, the space and environmental standards to which the homes are built, the amount of open space included, the scale and nature of infrastructure provision, the proportion of affordable homes included and finally the sale value of the completed development.

- 6.17** The Local Plan will be supported by a viability assessment which will test all the proposed policy requirements to help set them at a level that is viable for development to go ahead. A balance will need to be found as typically, higher expectations come at higher costs.

### Question 48

#### Delivery of new homes

What aspects should the Local Plan prioritise in the delivery of new homes?

### Issue: Housing mix

- 6.18** National policy encourages Local Plans to plan positively for a mix of housing to meet the current and expected future needs of the area. Supporting the delivery of a wide range of housing sizes and types in new developments is important as it helps to create balanced, inclusive and vibrant communities. Some of the key aspects of housing mix are set out as separate issues below.

- 6.19** Housing mix covers a broad spectrum of size, tenure and specialist housing. This has been split into two issues: this section and the following one which covers all aspects relating to the tenure of homes. The housing mix needed for Huntingdonshire has been assessed through the [Housing Needs of Specific Groups \(2021\)](#).

### Housing Size

- 6.20** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 offers support for development proposals which provide a mix of housing sizes, types and tenures that respond to local evidence of needs. The policy only guides development at a district-wide scale and does not put forward individual mix preferences for specific sites. Completions of new homes between 2011 and 2022 delivered 12% 1 bedroom homes, 27% 2 bedroom homes, 31% 3 bedroom homes and 30% 4 bedroom homes.
- 6.21** The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups](#) advises that in applying the mix to individual development sites any policies should be sufficiently flexible to take into account the nature of the site, the character of the area, the existing mix and turnover of properties in the local area and any up-to-date evidence of need. In terms of size, this has identified that the greatest need for market housing is for 3 bedroom properties (40-50%) followed by equal proportions of properties with 2 or 4+ bedrooms with least need for 1 bedroom properties.
- 6.22** The mix of housing sizes and types in any scheme is proposed by the prospective developer; the Council's Housing Strategy team advise on the mix of affordable housing most appropriate for the scheme. Each development site is different and depending on its characteristics, size and location may lend itself to a different mix of new homes.
- 6.23** Since 2019 there has been an upturn in the number of people working from home with potential implications for people's aspirations for the size of home they would like to live in. The [Office for National Statistics](#) recognises that the ability to work from home varies significantly by employment sector and levels of internet connectivity. They also indicate that [business](#)

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

[attitudes](#) towards home working are changing with around a quarter of businesses considering operating at least some portion of remote working as a permanent business model moving forwards.

### Question 49

#### Size of new homes

How should the Local Plan look to influence the mix of housing sizes within new developments?

### Question 50

#### Flexible living space

Should the Local Plan promote at least some homes offering flexible living space to allow for increased home working? If so, what proportion of homes should this be?

#### Specialist and older people's accommodation

- 6.24** The provision of a choice of attractive housing options targeted at older households is one element of delivering a good housing mix. Availability of such homes may enable some older people to downsize from properties that no longer meet their needs or are too expensive to run and help people move into suitable homes that can improve their quality of life. Whilst many people will stay in their long-term homes with support services visiting, others may find their needs are better met through moving to purpose designed retirement or extra care housing or through residential or nursing home accommodation.

- 6.25** Specialist and older people's accommodation can take a wide variety of forms although most fall into one of three broad categories:

- retirement living or sheltered housing (housing with support) which is typically housing with some support to live independently and may include some limited communal facilities
- extra care housing (housing with care) which allows for independent living but with 24 hour access to support services and staff and often extensive communal facilities and access to some meals
- residential care home and nursing homes which provide individual care bedspaces supported by a high level of care to meet health and daily living needs

- 6.26** Different forms of provision may be linked within a single site, such as a retirement village, to allow people to remain in the same location as their care needs increase due to declining mobility or worsening health conditions. Mainstream housing meeting accessible and adaptable homes standards is covered as a separate issue within the 'Issue: Housing standards' section.

- 6.27** The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups](#) shows that almost 90% of Huntingdonshire households aged 65 and over technically under occupy their homes; so a side-effect of providing additional purpose built properties suitable for downsizing could be greater numbers of larger properties coming back into the market and a reduction in the amount of land needed for new family homes. However, locational and quality aspects of new accommodation are likely to strongly influence people's decisions to move out of their larger long-term homes.

- 6.28** The number of older people living in Huntingdonshire is [forecast](#) to increase significantly with 15% of residents being aged 75 and over by 2042. Demand for specialist housing is typically influenced by health as well as age. The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups](#) indicates that around 14% of all new homes built should be specialist older people's housing with the greatest demand being for housing with support. Demand for spaces in

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

residential care and nursing homes is also expected to increase with a need estimated for around 1,800 additional bedspaces between 2020 and 2040.

### Question 51

#### Specialist and older people's accommodation

Which types of specialist or older people's housing are most needed here?  
Are there particular locations, or types of location, where they should be built?

#### Service personnel

- 6.29** Among the other specific groups identified in national guidance as people whose accommodation needs a Local Plan should look to specifically address are service personnel. Huntingdonshire has strong connections to the armed forces with active bases at RAF Alconbury, RAF Molesworth and RAF Wyton. The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups \(2021\)](#) identified demand for 1 and 2 bedroom rental accommodation for military service personnel, located in close proximity to active bases.
- 6.30** Many former bases have been decommissioned and redeveloped. The strong presence of the armed forces in the district means that many former service personnel and their families have settled here. Our [Custom and Self Build register](#) has a local connections test to track local demand for self-build and custom housebuilding. In line with national guidance one criteria of the Local Connections Test is whether an individual is or has been in the service of the regular armed forces of the Crown.

### Question 52

#### Service personnel

How should the Local Plan help to meet the housing needs of former or current service personnel?

### Issue: Housing tenures

- 6.31** Most homes in Huntingdonshire are owner occupied but substantial numbers are rented either within the private market or as social or affordable housing. There is also a growing number of shared ownership homes giving people a route into lower cost home ownership. Housing affordability is a challenge for many households in Huntingdonshire. According to the Office for National Statistics for the year ending September 2021 the median house price in Huntingdonshire was £295,000 which was 9.65 times the median gross earnings of £30,577. The average price of a house in the lower quartile of the market was £225,500 which was 9.21 times the median gross lower quartile earnings of £24,496.

- 6.32** The government define affordable homes as those for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers) and which complies with a series of detailed criteria. Affordable housing is mostly delivered by housebuilders

#### Housing at Lesley Way, Brampton



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

as a requirement of their planning permission for market housing. Sometimes schemes are built just to provide affordable housing, usually by a Registered Provider (Housing Association).

- 6.33** Providing a range of housing tenures gives people choices over whether to buy or rent a home or to choose a shared ownership or home available at discounted market prices with specific conditions attached to use and re-sale. In June 2021 the government introduced First Homes as a new form of affordable housing that differs from traditional options as it is only available to first time buyers aged under 40 and who meet a range of criteria relating to income and previous housing tenures. They expect that 25% of all new affordable homes provided should be First Homes to support people into home ownership. Purpose built 'build to rent' schemes offering tenancies of three years or more are also starting to add diversity to the housing tenures available elsewhere in the country.

### Affordable housing

- 6.34** Local evidence was prepared in 2020 across the Cambridge sub-region housing market area which includes Huntingdonshire and presents district level and comparative data and analysis. The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups](#) suggests that in Huntingdonshire it is reasonable for households to spend 30% of their income on housing costs although it acknowledges that many may spend a higher proportion than this. Based on March 2020 prices the evidence suggests that households required a gross income of at least £26,100 to rent privately in Huntingdonshire and £41,200 to buy a property. The study suggested that there is a net annual need for 404 new affordable homes in Huntingdonshire between 2020 and 2040. This equates to 42.5% of the 950 minimum new homes needed per year suggested by the government's standard methodology.
- 6.35** In terms of size, the greatest need is for 2 bedroom properties overall followed by 3 bedroom properties amongst affordable housing to buy and 1 bedroom properties amongst affordable housing to rent.

- 6.36** Land values vary across the district and according to individual site circumstances, particularly where land has been previously developed and clearance costs may be higher than on a greenfield site. It may also be necessary to balance priorities between affordable housing provision and other factors such as enhanced building standards, provision of space for community and other lower value uses, and infrastructure provision.

### Question 53

#### Affordable homes

What proportion of new homes should meet the government's definition of affordable housing? Should this be the same throughout Huntingdonshire or vary according to local circumstances?

### First Homes

- 6.37** Government policy introduced in 2021 means that the Local Plan will need to include properties through the [First Homes](#) scheme as the preferred form of discounted market tenure. At least 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers as part of their planning obligations on sites of 10 or more homes should be this tenure.
- 6.38** The government has set basic eligibility criteria for First Homes which in summary are: a purchaser should be a first time buyer, purchasers should have a combined annual household income not exceeding £80,000 and purchasers should have a mortgage or home purchase plan to fund at least 50% of the discounted purchase price. The government have also specified that the minimum discount should be 30% off the market price of an equivalent home. Additional eligibility criteria can be applied locally through the Local Plan if desired. For instance, these might set a lower maximum income threshold like £65,000 or a higher minimum discount from the market price of an equivalent home.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 54

#### First Homes

Should the Local Plan include additional eligibility criteria for First Homes schemes in Huntingdonshire?

#### Build to Rent housing

- 6.39** Increasing numbers of people face the prospect of not being eligible for affordable housing yet also unable to buy their own home so their housing needs have to be met in the private rental market. Institutional build to rent investment has predominantly been focused in larger urban areas so far but is expanding.
- 6.40** Build to rent homes are purpose built units usually offering tenancy agreements of three years or more which provide greater security to residents than the six month tenancies which are common in the private rental market. They are typically held in single ownership and professionally managed. Build to rent units may form part of a larger multi-tenure development. Build to rent units could play a part in diversifying Huntingdonshire's housing supply and help to meet the need for high quality, well-managed and secure private rented housing.

### Question 55

#### Built to Rent housing

Should the Local Plan allocate sites or parts of larger sites specifically for built to rent housing?

#### Community led housing

- 6.41** Community led housing provides another opportunity to diversify the housing supply and enable communities to create housing solutions to local issues. There are several types of community led housing with the most common being new build options of co-housing, community land trusts and community self-build and refurbishment as a self-help scheme. More details on the nature of projects can be found at [Community Led Homes](#). The housing is built or brought back into use by local people with open community participation throughout the process, local decisions on how the housing is managed and benefits are legally protected in perpetuity.

- 6.42** An example locally is The Green in Great Staughton which has been brought forward by the Great Staughton Community Land Trust with development of the site by Chorus Homes and home builders Aspen Homes. It is providing 12 affordable homes for people with a local connection consisting of a mixture of one to three bedroomed flats, houses and bungalows. Another example is in Cambridge with the co-housing scheme at [Marmalade Lane](#) which has created a sustainable neighbourhood of 42 award-winning homes with extensive community facilities and a sociable shared garden and car-free lane.

#### CLT housing in Great Staughton



### Question 56

#### Community led housing

Should the Local Plan support Community led housing schemes? Where would such schemes be most beneficial?



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Self and Custom Build housing

- 6.43** Self and custom build housing is formally defined within the [Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015](#) (as amended by the [Housing and Planning Act 2016](#)). In simple terms it is a home built to the plans or specifications decided by the intended occupier either directly themselves or commissioned from a builder. Despite perceptions of 'Grand Designs' style homes, self and custom build homes vary significantly in size and style with the greatest local demand being for detached houses and bungalows of high environmental standards. Self and custom build may be undertaken on individual sites or as part of a group project involving a cluster of homes where potential residents may work collaboratively.
- 6.44** Since 2015 the Council has kept a register of people looking for land to build their own new home. A new register is started at the end of October each year. Once the annual register has closed the Council has three years in which to 3 years in which to grant permission for an equivalent number of plots of land, which are suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding, as there were new registrations that year. There is no requirement for subsidy or direct provision of these plots.
- 6.45** Page 247 of the [Housing Needs of Specific Groups](#) indicates that an average of 54 registrations are made in Huntingdonshire each year and that permissions granted have been broadly equivalent. The National Custom and Self-Build Association suggest that registers typically underestimate demand. Nationally self and custom build accounts for 7-10% of new private homes built with completions in Huntingdonshire being within this range.
- 6.46** The [Letwin Review](#) considered greater choice could be brought into the housing market. Both this national study and the local one suggest encouraging inclusion of some plots for self and custom build within larger developments to enhance the supply. Developers however have previously expressed concerns about the practicality and viability of including self and custom build plots within larger developments.

### Question 57

#### Self and Custom Build housing

Should the Local Plan ask for some plots in all site allocations to be made available for self and custom builders?

### Rural Exceptions housing

- 6.47** People in village communities can face significant housing challenges having an impact on social and economic wellbeing, productivity and infrastructure. Young people who have grown up in the countryside are often unable to buy or rent a home there if they wish to stay local. Older residents can face difficulties too, with a shortage of accessible or specialist supported housing making it hard to downsize to suitable homes that meet their evolving needs. The declining average household size in Huntingdonshire is of concern in rural communities in particular. It is expected to lead to a reduced population living within the existing housing stock by 2043 resulting in less people to support any existing services and facilities. The [Office for National Statistics housing projections](#) estimate that average household size in Huntingdonshire will decline from 2.36 people in 2018 to 2.20 people by 2043.
- 6.48** One way of helping to meet the need for affordable homes for local people is through the construction of housing on a rural exceptions site. This is land where housing would not normally be given planning permission but can be given it where the community benefits outweigh any detrimental impacts of the site. The NPPF defines rural exception sites as 'Small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. Rural exception sites seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection.'

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 6.49** Rural exceptions housing is not limited to villages within Huntingdonshire but is particularly valuable in places where no or little affordable housing will be built as part of larger housing schemes. The sites are typically on the edge of a village. To incentivise landowners to sell land for rural exceptions housing scheme and to boost the viability of their provision the current Local Plan allows for up to 40% of the net site area to be used for market housing or self and custom build housing projects. This was in response to the low level of schemes coming forward.

### Question 58

#### Rural Exceptions housing

How and where should the Local Plan encourage provision of new homes through rural exceptions schemes?

### Issue: Housing standards

- 6.50** The physical construction standards to which new homes must adhere are set through nationally approved [Building Regulations](#) supported by a series of approved documents.
- 6.51** Substantial revisions were published in June 2022 primarily addressing conservation of fuel and power, ventilation, overheating and infrastructure for charging electric vehicles. Further revisions are scheduled to be brought in in 2025 through the [Future Homes Standard](#) relating to reducing the carbon emissions of new homes. These are addressed through 'Issue: Energy efficiency and retrofitting'.

- 6.52** However, in 2015 the government introduced a series of [Optional Technical Standards](#) for floorspace, accessibility and water efficiency of new homes. These can be included in a Local Plan subject to provision of sufficient local evidence of the need to do so and viability assessment of their implications to demonstrate that the extra costs involved in constructing homes to the higher standards would be viable in the local area.

### Space Standards

- 6.53** The amount of space within homes has a significant impact on the residents' quality of life. A [Study by the University of Cambridge](#) in 2014<sup>(7)</sup> concluded that newly built homes in the UK were the smallest in Europe at an average of 76 m<sup>2</sup> compared to 87.7 m<sup>2</sup> in Ireland, 109.2 m<sup>2</sup> in Germany and the largest being 137 m<sup>2</sup> in Denmark. The study indicated that lack of space can impact health, childhood development and social relationships.
- 6.54** The challenges of living in homes with a lower amount of space per person were highlighted in the lockdowns imposed during Covid 19 pandemic with impacts on people's ability to work, participate in education and on mental health. In contrast, additional space per person can support separation of different household activities, along flexibility for working and studying at home and increase capacity for social activities. However, more space in homes comes at a cost as more land may be required and building costs are higher impacting on the viability of developing a site.
- 6.55** The national minimum space standard deals with internal space within new dwellings including those created as a change of use through the prior approval mechanism. It sets out requirements for the minimum gross internal floor area of new dwellings depending on the number of people the home is designed to accommodate as well as floor areas and dimensions for key parts of the home, notably bedrooms, storage and floor to ceiling height. This was not included in Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036. By way of example, a one bedroom flat designed for two people would be expected

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

to have a gross internal floorspace of at least 50 m<sup>2</sup>; a three bedroom two storey house designed for five people would be at least 93 m<sup>2</sup>; and a five bedroom three storey house for eight people would be at least 134 m<sup>2</sup>.

and included in a policy in the next Local Plan. The [Housing Needs of Specific Groups](#) indicates that around 10% of all new market homes and 25% of all new affordable homes need to be suitable for wheelchair users.

### Question 59

#### Space Standards

Should the Local Plan require all new homes to meet the nationally described space standard?

### Question 60

#### Accessibility and Adaptability Standards

How can the Local Plan support the provision of some new homes at wheelchair accessible or adaptable standards?

#### Accessibility and Adaptability Standards

- 6.56** Two levels of higher standards were allowed for through the Optional technical Standards and implemented through Building Regulations. These were M4(2) 'accessible and adaptable homes' and M4(3) (a) 'wheelchair adaptable homes' and (b) 'wheelchair accessible homes'. Justified by evidence on local need, particularly reflecting the ageing population, Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 contains policy 'LP25 Housing Mix' which requires all new homes to be built to the 'accessible and adaptable' standards and a proportion of homes in developments of 50 or more homes to be built to 'wheelchair adaptable/ accessible' standards depending on tenure.
- 6.57** In September 2020 the government launched a consultation on raising accessibility standards throughout England. Their [response](#) to the comments received was published in July 2022 and states their intention to implement a requirement for all new homes to be built to M4(2) 'accessible and adaptable' standards unless clear evidence is given on a plot by plot basis that it is impractical and unachievable. This will be delivered through an update to Building Regulations. However, if wheelchair adaptable and accessible housing is to be required this still has to be locally evidenced

#### Water Efficiency Standards

- 6.58** In July 2021 DEFRA accepted the Environment Agency's report which defined the whole of eastern England as being in [serious water stress](#) which means that household demand for water is a high proportion of the effective rainfall available to meet that demand. Locally this covered both Anglian Water and Cambridge Water. The [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate](#) report in 2021 acknowledged that among the higher risks from climate change for Cambridgeshire are those to water supply and treatment including risks to public water supplies from drought and low river flow. Preparatory work in 2022 for Water Resources East [Regional Plan](#) indicates that the majority of demand is for potable water with 15% of water used in the region for agriculture, industry and energy.
- 6.59** In [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) the optional lower water standard allowed for through [Approved Document G](#) was adopted to ensure that new residential developments were designed to support use of a maximum of 110 litres of water per person per day. DEFRA are working through the Future Homes Hub to create a roadmap to greater water efficiency in new developments following [a call for evidence on water efficiency](#) which closed in September 2022. To achieve significantly lower water usage than

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

this way require changes to fittings, such as diverting water from basins to toilet cisterns, coupled with behaviour changes among residents. It is possible that greater water efficiency measures may be mandated before the Local Plan is completed but there is no certainty over this.

### Question 61

#### Water Efficiency Standards

Could the Local Plan justify introducing more ambitious water efficiency targets (below 110 litres/per/day) for new homes? If so, what is the lowest level of water usage new homes should be designed to support?

### Issue: Gypsy, Traveller, Travelling Showpeople and Boat-dwellers accommodation

- 6.60** Planning Policy for Traveller Sites was issued by the government in March 2012. It states that local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of sites against locally set targets, and identify a supply of specific, developable sites or broad locations for growth for years six to ten and, where possible, for years 11-15. These should address the likely permanent and transit site accommodation needs of people in the area. Needs of boat-dwellers are required to be considered to satisfy Huntingdonshire's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

#### Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople

- 6.61** The Local Plan to 2036 through policy 'LP27 Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople' sets out how the Council is positively seeking to meet the objectively assessed needs of Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople. It does not allocate any sites for gypsy and traveller pitches or travelling showpeople plots as sufficient plots had been granted in the

previous 5 years to meet calculated needs. A criteria based policy is included to consider the merits of any sites that are put forward which seeks to balance provision of new pitches and plots in sustainable locations that meet the needs of potential residents and respect their potential impacts on the countryside and nearby settled communities.

- 6.62** An updated study on accommodation needs for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople will be prepared by specialist consultants to help inform both the current nature of provision and the level and type of needs for future provision.
- 6.63** Providing permanent sites for good quality pitches and plots for gypsies, travellers and travelling showpeople can help improve opportunities for access to health care and education to support people in meeting these basic needs. The House of Commons report Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities (2019) recognised that children from Gypsy or Roma backgrounds or from a Traveller or Irish heritage background had the lowest attainment of all ethnic groups throughout their school years. The report also acknowledged that health outcomes are significantly worse with an average life expectancy of 10-12 years less than members of the settled community.
- 6.64** Planned site provision can also help reduce the number of unauthorised sites and encampments which can be a source of conflict between the travelling and settled communities. It will aid in resisting future speculative planning applications which may be in less sustainable locations and in taking effective enforcement action against unauthorised sites.

### Question 62

How should the Council meet future needs for pitches for gypsies and traveller and plots for travelling showpeople to live on?



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Boat dwellers and residential moorings

- 6.65** It is acknowledged that living on boats is a lifestyle choice for some residents and contributes to increasing the diversity of residential accommodation within the district. Marinas across the district include ones in Huntingdon, Buckden, Wyton, St Ives, Earith and Fenstanton. The number of berths, either residential or for leisure uses, is subject to frequent change. It is, however, considered reasonable to assume that residential use of boats represents a very small proportion of the total residential accommodation available in Huntingdonshire.
- 6.66** It is very difficult to gauge the proportion of existing moorings that may be suitable for conversion to residential use. Even more difficult is the assessment of suitable locations for new residential moorings. Policy 'LP38 Water Related Development' of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 provides the approach to residential moorings for boat dwellers. The Local Plan does not allocate any sites for new moorings. The proposed updated study on accommodation needs is intended to be expanded to include the needs of boat dwellers for future residential moorings to provide quantified evidence on the level and nature of local demand.

#### Question 63

#### Boat dwellers and residential moorings

How should the Council meet future needs for residential moorings for boat dwellers?

## 7 Promoting a prosperous local economy

- 7.1** Local Plans must help create conditions where businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Huntingdonshire has a number of locational advantages with two railway stations (St Neots and Huntingdon), access to the Guided Busway and direct strategic road links via the A14, A1, A428 and is close to the A421. These provide strategic business and commuting links across the Cambridge - Oxford - Milton Keynes area, to London, and north towards Peterborough, the Midlands and beyond.
- 7.2** In Huntingdonshire there are approximately 88,000 employees in Huntingdonshire (2021), the fourth highest in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough after Peterborough (128,000), Cambridge City Council (118,000), and South Cambridgeshire District Council (98,000)<sup>(8)</sup>. The number of jobs in Huntingdonshire grew by 2.2% between 2020 and 2021, but have not yet recovered to the peak of 90,000 in 2019.
- 7.3** Approximately 7,845 enterprises are present within the district, 89.93% of which are classed as Micro organisations (employ 0-9 workers), 8.29% are Small (10 to 49), with 1.47% Medium (50 to 249 employees) and 0.38% Large (employing over 250) (Source: [Inter Departmental Business Register](#) 2022 (ONS)<sup>(9)</sup>). Business types range from more urban based public sector organisations such as health care and advanced manufacturing to rural enterprises associated with agriculture. The effects of Covid and Brexit appear to have impacted on the number of enterprises in Huntingdonshire which declined by approximately 3.7% between 2020 and 2022.
- 7.4** Changes to working practices such as increased working from home and challenges resulting from inflation and cost of living increases demonstrate a need to provide flexible opportunities, not just for businesses,

<sup>8</sup> Source: [ONS jobs density](#). Total jobs includes employees, self-employed, government-supported trainees and HM Forces

<sup>9</sup> An 'enterprise' can be thought of as the overall business, made up of all the individual sites or workplaces. It is defined as the smallest combination of legal units (generally based on VAT and/or PAYE records) that has a certain degree of autonomy within an enterprise group.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

but employees also. Thought must be given to the needs of the rural and the urban communities in the district, their growth needs and potential opportunities for business and skills investment in the district to enable economic certainty and opportunity for residents and workers of the district.

- 7.5** This chapter addresses the specific issues in relation to 'Issue: A green economy', 'Issue: Supporting and diversifying the local economy', 'Issue: Logistics and distribution', 'Issue: Rural economy and agriculture', 'Issue: Retail and adapting our town centres' and 'Issue: Enhancing tourism'.
- 7.6** Issues related to the location and distribution of growth, including employment land allocations are addressed in 9 'Distributing new growth'.

### Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy Feedback

- 7.7** Feedback from engagement on the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy highlighted concerns regarding a lack of support for local businesses and the limitations that infrastructure e.g. lack of rail provision, place on attracting business and economic growth. People noted that thriving high streets are important to residents and the local economy (particularly retail), the lack of a night-time and cultural economy and access to it was also raised, as was the impact of online retail. People noted seeing an increasing divide based on socio-economic factors. It was also felt that health and technology innovations in Cambridge were a missed opportunity for the district to create more jobs in this sector and to provide better opportunities for young people.

### Issue: A green economy

- 7.8** The Government published its [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, October 2021](#) with an aim to "level up our country with new green jobs, end our contribution to climate change, and reverse the decline of our natural environment, leading the world to a greener, more sustainable future." (page 39).

- 7.9** The strategy focuses on two key aspects. Firstly it looks to reduce emissions through fuel usage, transport, greenhouse gas removal and heating in buildings. Secondly, the strategy looks to support the transition across the economy through addressing innovation, green investment, green jobs and skills and empowering businesses to make green choices.<sup>(10)</sup>

- 7.10** Some of these approaches will need addressing at a national level, however there may be ways that the Local Plan can enable or facilitate a local transition to a greener economy. This section looks at what the local plan can do to facilitate a green economy; issues regarding transport and logistics and distribution are addressed in the sections 'Issue: Travel and transport' and 'Issue: Logistics and distribution'.

- 7.11** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) requires non-residential uses such as businesses, entertainment venues, schools, community buildings. to meet [Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method](#) (BREEAM) standards 'Good' as a minimum (policy LP 12 Design Implementation). The BREEAM standards set out criteria for management, health and wellbeing, energy, transport, water, resources, resilience, land use and ecology, and pollution. The Local Plan also sets out how the district can contribute to the UK's energy infrastructure and efforts to achieve reductions in contributing factors to climate change through LP 35 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy. Employment related development in accessible sustainable locations are addressed through its Development Strategy.

- 7.12** Huntingdonshire District Council adopted a [Climate Strategy](#) on 22 February 2023. The Strategy sets out the priorities to achieve the commitment of a net zero carbon Council by 2040. It will seek to be a positive example through its own actions and to be an enabler, supporting action within communities and across our partners to deliver climate action across Huntingdonshire.

10 Note: this is not a comprehensive list.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 7.13** Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority will also be investing in a new Green Skills FE centre in Peterborough and new Construction Skills centres in Huntingdon and Wisbech<sup>(11)</sup>.
- 7.14** As part of the development of the Local Plan the Council should investigate the approaches and avenues that can be employed to assist Huntingdonshire's transition towards a green economy. The Government's [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, October 2021](#) identifies an number of areas of focus.
- 7.15** A greener economy could present itself in a variety of forms:
- Businesses that are working towards net zero by focussing on more environmentally friendly buildings and operations, reducing waste and emissions.
  - Businesses that produce or facilitate green products, renewable energy, environmental technologies etc.
  - More sustainable transport networks or solutions for workers, supply chains and the distribution of goods and services.
  - Increasing skills and jobs to facilitate green industry growth.
- 7.16** There are a number of factors that could influence how this could be achieved such as the demand and supply for different types of premises, the adaptability of premises, economic and financial circumstances and how this effects the opportunity to 'go green'.
- 7.17** The Local Plan can influence the district in a number of ways, it can allocate sites for development, set requirements for new developments and buildings and establish what type of development is considered acceptable or unacceptable.
- 7.18** Some businesses within the district such as [CHARPAK LTD](#) are at the forefront of the principles of the circular economy<sup>(12)</sup>, the packaging firm creates bespoke packaging containing up to 90% recycled material, reducing plastic waste and reusing existing materials.
- 7.19** Businesses across the UK have gone from [a high degree of business confidence \(Q3 2021/22\)](#) to battling a new set of challenges triggered by the war in Ukraine and the impacts of Brexit, supply chain difficulties, rising costs on raw materials and utilities. Many sectors are facing challenges with staff retention and the availability of skills set within an environment where inflation is outpacing wage increases. Sustainable / greening businesses is on the "to-do" list but as a task it has been placed much further down the list.
- 7.20** Further, the size of business may inhibit the ability of some businesses to respond to 'greening' as a result of limited resources and capabilities, this may be especially so for small or micro businesses. Only 62% of manufacturers identified that their workforce is equipped with the skills they need to manufacture goods and products in a more sustainable way ([MAKE UK](#)); a key consideration for the Huntingdonshire considering manufacturing is the largest sector in the district in terms of GVA and number of employees.
- 7.21** The ability of businesses to adapt to meet net zero targets will therefore depend on their size and the sector. N Power's [Business Blueprint to Net Zero](#) identifies that almost 50% of businesses are concerned about the potential additional cost needed to transition to net zero and that funding is required to assist with this. This means that creating site allocations for 'green businesses', dedicated net zero business zones or providing a more flexible permissive system for planning approval to facilitate a green economy, may be difficult to achieve through policy alone. The North West has extensive funding to facilitate a [net zero industrial cluster](#), however, focus across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is currently centred on

11 Source: [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Economic Recovery Strategy \(LERS\)](#)

12 Circular Economy - an economic model or production cycle focussed on tackling issues such as climate change and waste which minimises resource input, waste and emissions etc.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

smaller opportunities such as emission reduction and energy efficiency through funding initiatives as part of the Growth Hub's [Sustainability and net zero for businesses](#).

### Question 64

#### A green economy

What approaches can the Local Plan take to enable a greener economy?

### Issue: Supporting and diversifying the local economy

- 7.22** Planning policies that guide new economic growth and investment in Huntingdonshire need to ensure that it can support a strong and prosperous economy, linking skills with businesses. Council's should not just focus on investment, but also what can be done to increase productivity, opportunities to entice new opportunities for development and support existing local businesses. Strengths, weaknesses and new opportunities need to be identified to provide employment opportunities and income creation for local residents and workers.
- 7.23** In Huntingdonshire, 80.3% of the working age population (16 to 64 years) were in employment <sup>(13)</sup>, this compares to % in the 78.4% Eastern Region and 75.5% for Great Britain. The long-term impacts of the pandemic on certain industries such as hospitality are yet to be fully understood and we will need to respond to the changing landscape in terms of working practices, increased working from home, addressing supply chain issues, the impacts of Brexit and inflationary rises. Opportunities also exist to capitalise on Huntingdonshire's position with regard to the strategic transport network.

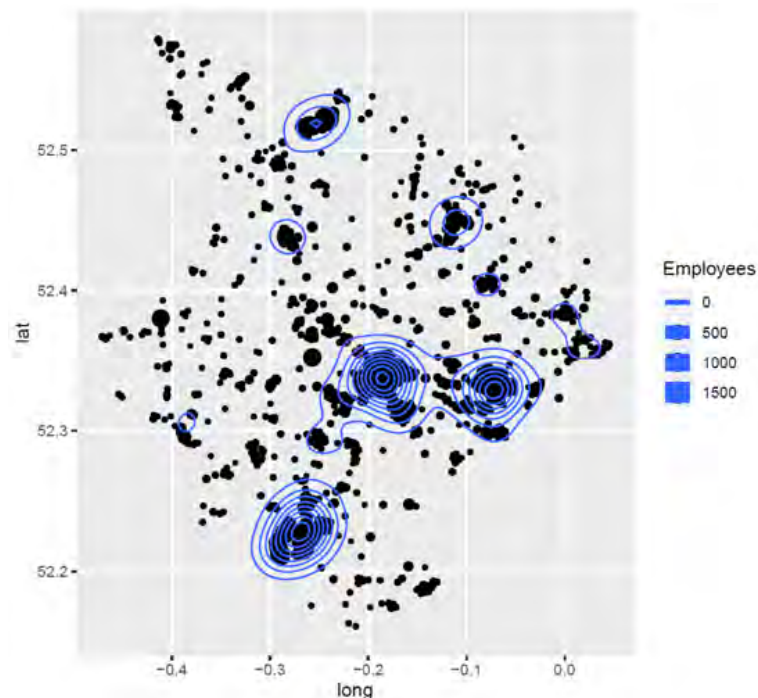
**7.24** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) makes provision for approximately 14,400 additional jobs for the period 2011-2036. In addition, the Strategy for Development (policy LP 2) focusses the majority of employment growth in Spatial Planning Areas and a limited amount of growth to Key Service Centres. The Local Plan sets out preferred locations for employment growth through site allocations, and settlement specific policies (policies LP7 to 9). Huntingdonshire's [Employment Land Study](#) (2014) provided an evidence base for the Local Plan.

**7.25** Specific policies are in place to protect employment uses in Established Employment Areas (LP 18) and provide opportunities for expansion. Alconbury Enterprise Zone, based at the Strategic Expansion Location at Alconbury Weald also allows for a substantial amount of employment opportunity including at least 290,000m<sup>2</sup> of business floorspace (class 'B') on 150 hectares of land.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

**Figure 7.1 Kernel density estimations of all enterprises, scaled to number of employees**



Source: FAME (2021) and IDBR (2020) data

- 7.26** Research by the Council's Economic Development team identifies that the business density is higher in the district's market towns of St Neots, Huntingdon and St Ives. Clear business clustering can also be seen around Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley. Employment sites can be vulnerable to

pressure from alternative higher value uses such as housing and retail which if not protected can lead to an adverse impact on the ability of businesses to establish, expand or relocate. Such a trend was seen during the transition to Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, which resulted in the amendment to the boundaries of St Peter's Road Industrial Area as a result of an increase in retail in locations such as Tower Field Leisure Park.

- 7.27** Anecdotal evidence shows that some businesses in the district are reporting a lack of land availability to support expansion and growth of existing clusters at the scale required. This is making competition fierce and driving pricing up, although this is not unique to Huntingdonshire it can be considered a disadvantage. In April to June 2022 research from GrowthWorks<sup>(14)(15)</sup> showed that 50 business in Huntingdonshire said that they need bigger premises.

### Question 65

#### The local economy

How can the Local Plan support local employment locations and industrial estates to help provide local jobs?

- 7.28** Since May 2013 [Permitted Development Rights](#) have allowed (subject to certain conditions and limitations) the conversion office buildings into residential units. This right was extended to additional uses on 1 August 2021 whereby uses such as offices, companies that are involved in industrial processes and research and development products and processes were amalgamated into a new use class ([Class E](#) - Commercial, Business and Service). These conversions do not require additional infrastructure

<sup>14</sup> Growth Works Management Review to 31 May 2022

<sup>15</sup> [Growth Works](#) is a transformational business growth service that has been set up to support the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority in delivering jobs and business growth to the region.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

provision such as green spaces and reduce the availability of office accommodation in sustainable locations meaning that new office development may need to be located further away from town centres, services and facilities.

complimentary services such as growing the advanced manufacturing sector. This may need to be linked with skills enhancement and sustainably located employment areas.

- 7.29** Between 2012 and 2021, the loss of office space in Huntingdonshire to residential redevelopment totalled 26,024.7 m<sup>2</sup> (floorspace) over 6.05 hectares (land area), of this, 15,264.4m<sup>2</sup> or 2.28 hectares were in the town centres of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey (Cambridgeshire County Council, Business Completions, 2021). In total, over the same time period there has been an overall net loss of office space totalling 1,069 m<sup>2</sup> or 7.03 ha.<sup>(16)</sup>

### Question 66

#### Challenges

What challenges to business and employment growth should the Local Plan try to address and how?

- 7.30** The 'Cambridge Cluster Insights Resource for Researchers' produced by [Cambridge Ahead](#) shows that Huntingdonshire is home to a small amount of Life Science and Knowledge Intensive companies. However, the Manufacturing sector is the largest contributor to the local economy generating £3,538.7m to the economy and employing over 13,000 people. Wholesale Retail and Distribution and Construction and Utilities also provide a major contribution to the district. Opportunities also exist to provide greater linkages to the Cambridge - Oxford - Milton Keynes innovation corridor by establishing small hi-tech or biotech clusters, or

**Table 2 Huntingdonshire Industry**

Industry Type	Number of Companies (Alive)	Total Employment	Total Turnover (£,000)
Primary	155	694	164,707
Information technology and telecoms	551	3,051	489,403
Life science and healthcare	66	1,459	182,380
Manufacturing	474	13,449	3,538,709
Wholesale and retail distribution	596	5,524	2,104,718
Construction and utilities	792	9,643	2,288,909
Transport and travel	275	1,348	177,192
Property and finance	709	1,986	256,750
Knowledge intensive services	168	864	96,903
Other business services	1,076	7,427	704,118
Other services	737	4,305	321,583
Education, arts, charities, social care	206	3,837	171,094

Source: Cambridge Cluster Insights Resource for Researchers from [Cambridge Ahead](#) 2020-21

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 7.31** In the wider area start up hubs provide low cost opportunities for new business/sector development. Nationally, coworking buildings are being created to provide meeting spaces and interaction with other businesses where infrastructure and services can be shared; allowing for cost savings, social interaction and flexible working. This is a key aim of St Ives' [Prospectus for Growth](#) which wants to build on the growth of existing co-working space (such as The Desk Club) in the town creating an innovation quarter, which could also benefit from its sustainable transport links to Cambridge.

### Question 67

#### Protecting and supporting the economy

Are there certain sectors that the Local Plan should focus on encouraging, protecting or supporting and how?

### Question 68

#### Future business needs

How can the Local Plan help facilitate the future needs of businesses?

- 7.32** Approximately 7,845 enterprises are present within the district, 89.93% of which are classed as Micro organisations (employ 0-9 workers), 8.29% are Small (10 to 49), with 1.47% Medium (50 to 249 employees) and 0.38%

Large (employing over 250) (Source: [Inter Departmental Business Register](#) 2022 (ONS). The percentage of businesses by size is generally reflective of County, Regional and English distribution <sup>(17)</sup>.

- 7.33** Interestingly some of the Micro organisations operate within the creative, digital and biotech industries. This could be as a result of the 'Cambridge effect', however more research would be required to understand if this is the case. SME organisations demonstrate the district's links with manufacturing and advanced manufacturing which is a high priority sector for the district (see the [Economic Growth Strategy for Huntingdonshire District 2020-2025](#)), whilst the influence of public sector organisations such as Hinchingbrooke Hospital can be seen in the Large organisation category.

**Table 3 Industries by Size of Business**

Micro 0-9 employees	SME 10-249 employees	Large 250+ employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative and digital industries</li> <li>• Building, plumbing, electrician</li> <li>• Computer consultancy</li> <li>• Biotech</li> <li>• Hairdressing &amp; beauty therapy</li> <li>• Accounting &amp; auditing services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management consultancy</li> <li>• Plastics manufacturing</li> <li>• Paper manufacturer</li> <li>• Composites</li> <li>• Metal fabrication</li> <li>• Hospitality</li> <li>• Primary education</li> <li>• Freight transport</li> <li>• Retail</li> <li>• Financial management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meat processing &amp; preserving</li> <li>• Food manufacturing</li> <li>• Hospital &amp; other human health activities</li> <li>• Utilities (Water collection, treatment &amp; supply)</li> <li>• Manufacture of electrical equipment</li> <li>• Secondary education</li> </ul>

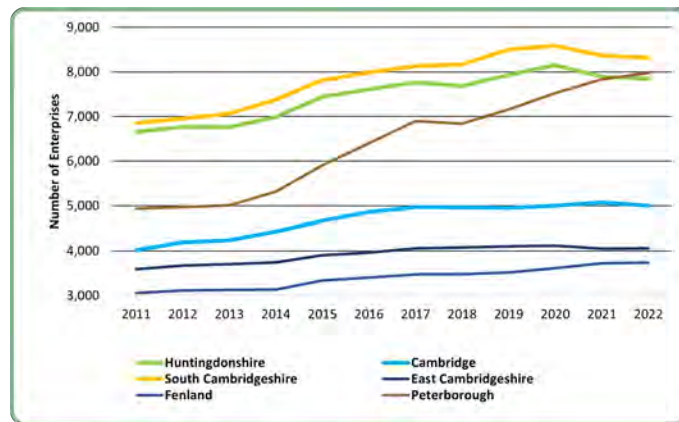
Source: ONS Inter Departmental Business Register (2021).

<sup>17</sup> An 'enterprise' can be thought of as the overall business, made up of all the individual sites or workplaces. It is defined as the smallest combination of legal units (generally based on VAT and/or PAYE records) that has a certain degree of autonomy within an enterprise group.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 7.34** The number of enterprises in Huntingdonshire declined by approximately 3.7% between 2020 and 2022. Only South Cambridgeshire is seeing a similar pattern of decline at 3.14% between 2020 and 2022. Across the rest of the County most districts are in recovery.

**Figure 7.2 Number of enterprises by year**



further automation and retail decline", the CPCA will be investing in a new Green Skills FE centre in Peterborough and new Construction Skills centres in Huntingdon and Wisbech<sup>(18)</sup>.

- 7.36** Some Local Plans encourage 'Meanwhile Uses' which means that vacant or underutilised premises or sites can be occupied by a different use on a temporary basis to reinvigorate or sustain the vitality and viability of an area, whilst an appropriate use is found. This allows flexibility in economically challenging times but also ensures that appropriate uses can return to sustainable locations when the economy picks up.

### Question 69

#### Responding to change

How can the Local Plan help to support a flexible local economy and local businesses?

- 7.35** The impact of the pandemic meant many businesses reverted to a more flexible way of working including working from home or a hybrid system, which reduces floorspace and thus rental and maintenance costs. The percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment who were working mainly at or from home in Huntingdonshire in 2021 was 34.9%; the figure for England was 31.5% and percentages ranged across the country from 10.6% to 67.3% (Census 2021). However the continuation of this trend wholly or in part is currently unknown. In response to the impact that this has had on young people, women and older people in particular combined with the longer term loss of roles in the service sector due to

### Issue: Logistics and distribution

- 7.37** The Office of National Statistics reported in April 2022 that "The number of business premises used for transport, logistics and warehousing in the UK has almost doubled in the last decade". Premises for such uses are reported to be concentrated in the Midlands. These premises are now also concentrated in parts of the East of England, Yorkshire and The Humber that were not previously associated with the industry<sup>(19)</sup>. This rise is said to have accelerated in the past two years following EU exit and as a result of the pandemic and online shopping. It is currently unknown whether this trend will continue.

<sup>18</sup> Source: [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Economic Recovery Strategy \(LERS\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> [The rise of the UK warehouse and the "golden logistics triangle"](#).



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 7.38** Recent announcements by the Department for Transport in June 2022<sup>(20)</sup> announced that "Millions of people across the UK will be encouraged to kickstart a rewarding career in logistics, with the government unveiling a multimillion-pound new plan to bolster the supply chain and create a more resilient and greener haulage sector." In addition the Government proposed a call for evidence to help understand the needs of the sectors and it's relationship with the planning system.
- 7.39** Huntingdonshire District Council's 'Huntingdonshire: Industry clusters' (November 2018) report categorised logistics and ecommerce as including the following industries<sup>(21)</sup>: Retail sale via mail order houses or via Internet, Freight rail transport, Freight transport by road, Inland freight water transport, Warehousing and storage, Cargo handling, Other postal and courier activities, Renting and leasing of trucks. It identified the logistics and ecommerce sector as once of the districts strengths, this was primarily reflected through hauliers located in proximity to the A1 (page 23).
- 7.40** Parking provision for the logistics and distribution sector is covered in 'Issue: Parking provision'
- 7.41** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) currently has no specific provision for large warehouse or distribution sites. However, opportunities do exist to allow for additional land for such uses through the policy LP 18 Established Employment Areas whereby "A proposal for business development (class 'B') will be supported on land within an Established Employment Area or on land immediately adjoining and capable of being integrated with an Established Employment Area" (page 81). These policies have allowed for the creation of 39,449m<sup>2</sup> (floorspace - net) of B8 uses (Storage or Distribution - This class includes open air storage) on 21.4 hectares of land (net)<sup>(22)</sup>. In addition as of 31 March 2021, 59,693 m<sup>2</sup> of Storage and Distribution uses on 19.81 hectares of land had permission, 7,787m<sup>2</sup> of which was already under construction<sup>(23)</sup>. These appear to be smaller sites, supporting the productivity of agricultural businesses and established industrial areas.<sup>(24)</sup>
- 7.42** Huntingdonshire's [Employment Land Study](#) (2014) provided an evidence base for the Local Plan. The study assessed the employment and economic environment within Huntingdonshire, as well as analysing employment land and premises demand, supply and need across the district. More recently Huntingdonshire District Council's 'Huntingdonshire: Industry clusters' (November 2018) was produced to explore the opportunities for Huntingdonshire to improve its economic position and understand challenges the district faces around productivity, job creation and living standards.
- 7.43** Both the [Ready to Recover" Economic Growth Strategy For Huntingdonshire District 2020-2025](#) and [Economic Growth Plan 2020-2025](#) note that Huntingdonshire's location and transport links make the district an attractive base for the Logistics and Distribution sector. Recent upgrades to the A14 and planned upgrades to the A428/A421 also provide additional opportunity, as does the prospect of a potential [East-West Railway](#)<sup>(25)</sup> which would provide east west connections from Milton Keynes to Cambridge adding to the already strong north south rail links already established in the district.
- 7.44** However, there are a number of issues that the Local Plan must consider in terms of provision of land for logistics and distribution. Firstly, many logistics and distribution centres rely predominantly on automation, meaning large areas of land would be released for development but result in very few jobs being created. The [Economic Growth Plan 2020-2025](#) also notes

20 [Boost for freight as government unveils major new plan to bolster supply chain](#) - 15 June 2022

21 Based on Standard Industrial Classification definitions.

22 Between 2011 and 2021

23 All figures are net.

24 Source: Cambridgeshire County Council - Business completions and commitments.

25 It should be noted that connections from Bedford to Cambridge have not been officially confirmed at the time of writing.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

that whilst there is a "clear agglomeration of logistics and distribution centres in Peterborough and we must be mindful of how we utilise commercial land across the district to ensure we help our residents secure higher skilled jobs which are sustainable as opposed to lower skilled jobs which will be vulnerable to technological advances" (page 24).

- 7.45** Secondly, in December 2021 Huntingdonshire District Council adopted the aspiration of a net carbon zero Huntingdonshire by 2040 complemented by a series of environmental principles based on those agreed by authorities across the Ox-Cam corridor. This included, but is not limited to, working to the target of net-zero carbon at a district level by 2040, that new development should be designed with a view to minimising and mitigating the effects of climate change and that new communities see real benefits in their well-being from living in Huntingdonshire.
- 7.46** This means that the Council needs to understand the climate change impact as a result of increased emissions, thinking about first and last mile distribution options, or potential development guidelines as such as the creation of disruptive frameworks. For example, creating policies that improve economic incentives for investment and the adoption of new business models to respond to rapid changes in technology and market influences. An example could be allocating a strategic site of interest to the distribution and logistics sector with a major anchor business which provides carbon neutral or hi-technology business operations that in turn draw in associated supply chain businesses that can then benefit from, and adopt, similar innovative solutions in their operations.

### Question 70

#### Logistics and distribution

How should the Local Plan address logistics and distribution? What issues need to be considered?

### Issue: Rural economy and agriculture

- 7.47** Research by the Council's Economic Development team identifies that business density is higher in the district's market towns of St Neots, Huntingdon and St Ives. This is illustrated on the map provided in 'Issue: Supporting and diversifying the local economy'. However, the map also shows a distinct number of businesses in the rural areas.
- 7.48** DEFRA official statistics (March 2022)<sup>(26)</sup> identify that rural areas contribute £261bn to the economy and that 11.7 million people (21% of England's population) live in rural areas. It is important to note that whilst rural economies are associated with agriculture, 85% of rural businesses are unrelated to agriculture. DEFRA identifies that 'education, health and social work', 'wholesale and retail plus the repair of motor vehicles' and 'manufacturing' provide 41% of rural employment<sup>(27)</sup>. Tourism is also an important contributing factor which becomes more significant when understanding employment opportunities in rural areas. The importance of small businesses should also not be underestimated.
- 7.49** Many of these industries will be located in small settlements, some of which is addressed in the section 'Issue: Supporting and diversifying the local economy' likewise issues relating to tourism will be addressed in 'Issue:

<sup>26</sup> [Rural Economic Bulletin for England, March 2022](#)

<sup>27</sup> Employment categories based on [Standard Industrial Classifications](#).

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Enhancing tourism'. This section will predominantly address the topic of agriculture and rural economy in the sense of economic opportunities located in the countryside.

- 7.50** To promote a vibrant rural economy within the countryside policy LP 19 Rural Economy was introduced in [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) to support businesses with a genuine need to be located in the countryside, to assist farms to maintain their viability and to set out the approach to proposals for other businesses in the countryside. This is balanced with other priorities such as the protection of the best and most versatile land<sup>(28)</sup>, landscape impact (LP 10 The Countryside) and the sustainable location of appropriate uses concentrating development in locations which provide, or have the potential to provide, the most comprehensive range of services and facilities (LP 2 Strategy for Development). A further policy LP 33 Rural Buildings sets out the approach to proposals for the reuse or replacement of buildings in the countryside that fall outside of the 'Prior Approval/ Notification' process.
- 7.51** Huntingdonshire is a largely rural district, and includes substantial areas of high quality agricultural land, a breakdown of the Grades and locations of agricultural land can be found in 'Issue: The countryside'. Agriculture is a significant part of Huntingdonshire's economy and contributes significantly to UK food production. Across the region farmers "produced crops and livestock worth £3.4 billion in 2019, across 1.4 million hectares of land"<sup>(29)</sup>. Local agricultural production, processing and sales helps to reduce food miles and maintains the working character of the countryside supporting jobs and reducing carbon emissions. Huntingdonshire has a total farmed area of 74,896 hectares, with a workforce of 1,308<sup>(30)</sup>.
- 7.52** In 2022 there were 480 local units in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector across Huntingdonshire, this is a decrease from 525 in 2015 (-8.6%)<sup>(31)</sup>. Within Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Cambridge saw a higher loss of 18.2% and 14.3% respectively. Across the Eastern region and England the decline in the sector was 8.1% and 4.7% respectively.
- 7.53** Most farms in Huntingdonshire focus on cereal and general cropping production with limited amounts of livestock. In 2021 Cereal crops accounted for just over half (52.8%) of all farmed land within Huntingdonshire with other arable crops comprising the second most extensive farmland. Fruit and vegetable growing demonstrated a marked increase in Huntingdonshire between 2010 and 2016 although it fell across Cambridgeshire overall. The numbers of livestock kept were more volatile in this period. Sheep and poultry numbers both decreased slightly in Huntingdonshire but the proportion of them compared to livestock across the whole of Cambridgeshire decreased significantly due to increases in the numbers kept in Fenland and Peterborough<sup>(32)</sup>.
- 7.54** The Campaign to Protect Rural England published [Building on our Food Security](#) (July 2022). The report addressed the loss of the 'best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV)'<sup>(33)</sup>. The research suggests that in the East of England 3,232 hectares of BMV (predominantly Grade 2) land has been 'lost' to development<sup>(34)</sup> since 2010; this is the greatest absolute loss within a single region. Nationally in the past 12 years over 14,000 hectares of BMV have been 'lost' to development equating to 287,864 houses and equivalent to the "productive loss of around 250,000 tonnes of vegetables and enough to provide nearly two million people with their 5-a-day for an entire year." (Page 5). The report notes that the increasing amounts of BMV

28 Best and most versatile agricultural land: Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.

29 [National Farmers Union](#)

30 [Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK at June](#), 2021 DEFRA

31 UK Business Counts - local units by industry and employment size band, 2022 ([NOMIS](#))

32 DEFRA: [Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK at June](#) (2021) . Figures include commercial scale production only

33 Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the [Agricultural Land Classification](#).

34 This includes residential, business, renewables etc.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

land subject to development is "likely resulting from continued pressure on local planning authorities to find land within their districts to meet their nationally imposed housing targets"(Page 22).

**7.55** Agriculture is facing a variety of challenges; drought and flooding as a result of climate change impede productivity, farmers also face increasing environmental targets, labour shortages, and increasing costs relating to inflation, transportation and international competition. Diversification can be an important way to ensure the long term viability for agricultural business and operators enabling job retention. Additional income can ensure survival and enhance the wider rural economy. Farm diversification schemes could include farm shops, cafes and restaurants, holiday or tourism destination creation and creative retreats etc. It most likely will involve changing the use of land and/ or re-using (or redeveloping) existing buildings so that they can be used to generate additional incomes.

**7.56** In addition, to provide homes for Farm workers, owners may wish to provide additional on-site housing. In some cases [Permitted Development Rights](#) (subject to certain conditions and limitations) allow for the conversion of agricultural buildings to other uses such as residential accommodation that could provide a supplementary financial boost to businesses. However the over-delivery of residential units in the countryside could also see the creation of less sustainable communities which lack appropriate infrastructure to serve new residents.

### Question 71

#### Agricultural uses

How can the Local Plan address the needs of the agricultural sector?

**7.57** There are also other businesses that may have a genuine need to be located in the countryside where either a rural location is essential to the successful operation of the business or the business is dependent upon natural resources only available in limited locations.

**7.58** The Local Plan must also address how the expansion of businesses located in the countryside could be achieved in a sustainable way and what new business uses should be considered acceptable in a countryside location, taking into account that digital infrastructure is less reliable in such locations ( see also 'Issue: Utilities and digital infrastructure').

### Question 72

#### Other acceptable uses

What uses would be considered acceptable in a countryside location?

**7.59** The challenge in Huntingdonshire will be to ensure that a balance is struck which benefits all. This means balancing supporting a rural economy and providing opportunities for communities to achieve local development aspirations, with protecting the character of existing settlements and recognising the character and beauty of the surrounding countryside, minimising the impact on important aspects of the natural environment. Additionally, the impacts on local road networks, congestion and increased emissions will need to be considered to ensure a climate friendly approach, as will the environmental principles of the Environmental Act 2021 which allows the Government to set targets for issues such as air and water quality, biodiversity, and waste reduction. The size and scale of development will also be an important factor.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 73

#### Balance and requirements

A balance needs to be struck between the benefits of countryside development and the impact this may have. What requirements or restrictions would help to ensure developments are sustainable.

#### Issue: Retail and adapting our town centres

- 7.60** Huntingdonshire sits within a largely rural district, key retail, services and facilities are predominantly based around the four market towns of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey, acting as service centres for nearby settlements. Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 also identified seven further settlements that were considered to offer a healthy concentration of services and facilities that could provide services to other nearby communities, these included: Buckden, Fenstanton, Kimbolton, Sawtry, Somersham, Warboys and Yaxley.
- 7.61** Retail Sales in Great Britain for May 2022 <sup>(35)</sup> paint a stark picture. Although retail sales have recovered slightly by 2.6% from February 2020 levels (during the pandemic), in the three months to May 2022, sales volumes fell by 1.3% when compared with the previous three months; continuing a downward trend which commenced in 2021. The fall in retail sales was mostly attributed to food store sales, which fell by 1.6%. The Office of National Statistics attributes this to the impact of rising food prices and the cost of living. Even online sales fell in May 2022 to 26.6% from 27.1% in April, however this figure is still higher than pre pandemic sales levels

of 19.7% (recorded in February 2020). These trends have placed the high street, both nationally and locally under pressure. Initial data from December shows that this trend is continuing.

- 7.62** In July 2021 the government introduced the policy paper '[Build Back Better High Streets](#)' with the intention of creating "vibrant high streets where communities are at the heart of place-making; where a mix of commercial and residential uses complement each other; and where businesses large and small feel welcome." This led to the introduction of initiatives such as the [Future High Streets Fund](#), changes to the [Use Class Order](#) and [Permitted Development Rights](#).
- 7.63** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) contains policies to maintain town centres of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey as centres for local communities, providing retail, entertainment, office, leisure and cultural facilities (LP 21 Town Centre Vitality and Viability). It establishes the preferred location for such uses to be within defined areas such as Primary Shopping Frontages<sup>(36)</sup>, Primary Shopping Areas<sup>(37)</sup> and Town Centres<sup>(38)</sup>. The aim of the policy is to maintain the vitality and viability of Town Centres, by providing 'active frontages' to encourage footfall e.g. properties with large windows and doors at ground floor level which face onto the street to encourage interest and engagement. Markets are also considered important to the vitality of town centres.
- 7.64** The presence of out of town retail also has a part to play by providing for access to more specialised retail such as hardware and DIY stores, warehouse retailing, garden centres, furniture stores etc. where a larger store footprint is required and car use to transport goods is more essential due to the nature of the items purchased. The most notable retail parks are located in Huntingdon, St Neots and St Ives.

35 Office of National Statistics: [Retail Sales for Great Britain May 2022](#)

36 Main thoroughfares for town centres where footfall is highest.

37 Main concentrated retail areas.

38 The wider centralised town centre area.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 7.65** In smaller settlements policy LP 22 Local Services and Community Facilities supports planning proposals for local services and community facilities in the built up area to enhance the offer for local residents and to prevent the loss of such facilities wherever possible.
- 7.66** Assessment of the retail and leisure market in Huntingdonshire, its performance and future needs were conducted through the [Huntingdonshire Retail and Commercial Leisure Needs Assessment \(February 2017\)](#). This informed the current Local Plan.
- 7.67** Further work is underway to enhance the market towns in Huntingdonshire. The Council has secured funding from the Government's Future High Streets Fund for St Neots. £12.8 million is anticipated to be invested in the town centre. The investment will transform the market town for the benefit of local people, businesses, and visitors. The [St Neots Future High Streets Fund](#) will also deliver six projects, including the redevelopment of the Priory Quarter to provide a high-quality event and cultural space; the regeneration of the Old Falcon Inn to bring it back into productive use and protect its heritage status; and a new waterfront route, including a riverside promenade to create a new attraction in the town centre.
- 7.68** Work to develop interventions to improve the town centres of Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey is also underway. Studies have been commissioned by the Council which will result in a 'masterplan' for each town outlining interventions to enhance their vitality and viability. The final masterplans are expected to be published in 2023. Opportunities exist in the masterplans to regenerate underused or tired areas within or adjacent to town centres such as the bus station quarters in St Ives and Huntingdon.
- 7.69** The Local Plan could help to enable some of the final identified schemes once confirmed. However, this would require significant evidence to justify their inclusion and ensure that they are balanced enough to provide other

priorities for the district such as affordable housing, climate change measures, biodiversity net gain etc. The Local Plan would have to also ensure that the requirements of the schemes and other Local Plan obligations can be delivered and are financially viable. Those schemes that meet this criteria could be enabled through specific planning policies that could set criteria for appropriate uses on the sites, key infrastructure or even design considerations that should be included in the redevelopment of the land.

### Question 74

#### Regeneration in town centres and high streets

Are there any sites that could benefit from guided policies to enable the regeneration and reinvigoration of the districts market towns or high streets? What should they focus on?

- 7.70** On the 1 September 2020 the Government amalgamated a number of use classes into one single use class ([Class E](#)), this meant that retail uses such as cafes, restaurants, shops were combined with uses such as offices, research and development of products or processes and industrial processes. In addition, the Government introduced new [Permitted Development Rights](#) on 1 August 2021 <sup>(39)</sup> allowing the conversion of "almost all shops, cafés, restaurants, gyms, nurseries and day centres into homes without having to apply for full planning permission" <sup>(40)</sup>. Research undertaken in July 2021 for the Town and Country Planning Association <sup>(41)</sup> found that 80.3% of shops and other commercial buildings (on average) could be lost to residential conversion. In Huntingdonshire this was estimated at 75%. These changes limit current Local Plans' abilities

39 Meaning that certain types of work or changes of use can be undertaken without needing to apply for planning permission (subject to certain conditions and limitations)

40 [Our Fragile High Streets – Death by Permitted Development Rights?](#)

41 [Our Fragile High Streets – Death by Permitted Development Rights?](#)

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

to respond to local conditions and protect the vitality and viability of our high streets and neighbourhood and town centres limiting employment and leisure opportunities.

- 7.71** The general decline of the retail sector coupled with the affects of austerity and cost of living increases has lead to a lack of retail offer and services within smaller settlements. This leads to an increase in emissions as people travel further to reach shops and a separation of disadvantaged groups and rural settlements from access to retail, services and local employment opportunities, decreasing the quality of life of all involved.
- 7.72** The Royal Society for Public Health's study [Health on the High Street 2019 - Running on Empty](#) (page 25) noted that clusters of empty shops not only affect the feel of the high street, but give the perceived impression of antisocial behaviour and lack of safety. This creates a negative social impact upon high streets and local centres. This can be seen on high streets in smaller settlements, such as Kimbolton where many retail units are now residential properties and the market town of Ramsey which has seen an increase in residential uses focused on areas around Great Whyte . It is therefore important to ensure that settlements retain or develop healthy high streets to ensure sustainable development and reduce inequalities and the impact on the environment.
- 7.73** Mechanisms such as Article 4 directions could be introduced separate to the Local Plan. These can remove permitted development rights in specific areas, allowing Local Planning policies to be used to assess the suitability of the proposal, however this does not restrict changes of use within the same use class e.g. Class E and are limited in their scope through [NPPF](#) paragraph 53.
- 7.74** Footfall in three of the district's market towns - St Ives, St Neots and Huntingdon - were monitored by the Council in 2021; of the 3 towns monitored, footfall in Huntingdon appears to be the most volatile. For the

entire year of 2021, all three of the market towns appear to have outperformed the Market Town Index<sup>(42)</sup>. Evidence suggests that planned events such as Christmas lights switch-ons and family fun days provide increased footfall and interest in the town centres.

### Question 75

#### Successful town centres and high streets

How do we ensure successful town centres or high streets?

### Question 76

#### Retail and town centre uses

What types of uses do you consider would add to the vitality and viability of local centres and town centres? How should they evolve? What could be avoided?

### Issue: Enhancing tourism

- 7.75** The NPPF identifies *Main Town Centre Uses* as including, but not limited to: retail, leisure, entertainment, sport and recreation uses such as cinemas, arts, culture and tourism including theatres, museums, galleries and concert halls, hotels and conference facilities. The four market towns of Huntingdon,

42 The Market Towns Index records week-on week footfall performance from available Market Town footfall counts conducted by [Springboard](#) (where capacity exists to record such information).

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

St Ives, Ramsey and St Neots act as strategic hubs for the district providing leisure and tourism facilities such as accommodation, museums and access to the River Great Ouse.

- 7.76** The District benefits from its rural location. The River Great Ouse is a main feature of the district; a 26 mile section of the Ouse Valley Way runs through Huntingdonshire, winding its way from St Neots to Earith providing opportunities for walking, boating, angling and other water sports. Numerous lakes provide canoeing opportunities along with fishing, walking and wildlife viewing. There are several marinas across the district at destinations such Buckden, Huntingdon and Hartford which provide a range of fixed and floating moorings to suit the majority of craft types found on inland waterways.
- 7.77** A number of leisure and tourism opportunities also exist outside the market towns including Grafham Water and historic sites such as Houghton Mill, Elton Hall, Huntingdon Race course (Brampton), Buckden Towers, The manor at Hemingford Grey and Kimbolton Castle which not only provide leisure opportunities, but also specific business and employment opportunities.
- 7.78** The Great Fen is also a strategic habitat restoration project of national significance. As well as the environmental benefits that the project provides through its work restoring habitats and the peatland landscape, it is promoting the eco-tourism sector within the district. Another key aim of the project is to celebrate and preserve the fenland heritage through education and outreach programmes.
- 7.79** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 permits tourism uses in appropriate locations within built up areas and in addition in areas well related to the built up area in Key Service Centres and Small Settlements. The key policies are LP 7 to 9, LP 23 Tourism and Recreation, LP 16 Sustainable Travel and LP 38 Water Related Development. The policies ensure that tourism

related uses are appropriately located, do not cause undue harm, can enhance ecological, landscape and heritage significance in the area, are of an appropriate size and that adequate services can be provided.

- 7.80** Work to develop interventions to improve the town centres of Huntingdon, St Ives and Ramsey is also underway. Studies have been commissioned by the Council which will result in a 'masterplan' for each area outlining interventions to enhance the vitality and viability of the town centres (see 'Issue: Retail and adapting our town centres'). In addition, the [St Neots Future High Street Fund](#) is £12.8 million investment in St Neots town centre. The fund will deliver six projects, including redevelopment of the Priory Quarter to provide a high-quality event and cultural space; the regeneration of the Old Falcon Inn to bring it back into productive use and protect its heritage status; and a new Waterfront Route, including a riverside promenade to create a new attraction in the town centre.
- 7.81** The [Great Britain Tourism Survey](#) (GBTS)<sup>(43)</sup> estimates that on average, between 2017 and 2019, 1.38 million trips were taken each year to Cambridgeshire, of which 198,000 were to Huntingdonshire. This equated to 3.75 million nights per year to Cambridgeshire and 560,000 nights per year to Huntingdonshire at an annual value to the economy of £210 million and £28 million respectively.<sup>(44)</sup> Within Cambridgeshire, Cambridge and Peterborough outperform Huntingdonshire when comparing the number of trips and annual value. Most trips within Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire were to visit family and friends followed by holidays and then business trips.
- 7.82** In 2019, UK trends show that nature contributed £12 billion to the tourism and leisure industry and that outdoor-related activities rose from £1.2 billion to £1.5 billion between 2011 and 2016. In addition outdoor-related activities in urban settings accounted for over 60% of all nature-based spending in 2019 within Great Britain 30% of which involved walking, running and cycling. However, the majority of spend, activities and outdoor leisure

43 A national consumer survey

44 [Great Britain Tourism Survey 2019](#) Annual Report: Table 2.8 - Local Authority Destination and purpose.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

activities took place in an urban setting. Between 2011 and 2019 adventure and water sports spending also increased from £1.5 billion to £1.8 billion (45)

**7.83** In Huntingdonshire it is also apparent that leisure and tourism opportunities can be boosted locally through local markets, outdoor events and local festivals such as [Ramsey Carnival](#), [St Neots Bands in the Park](#) series and Dragon Boat Festival and events at venues such as the [St Ives Corn Exchange](#) and leisure opportunities such as visits to the cinema or Hinchingsbrooke Country Park in Huntingdon. Due to the nature of tourism in Huntingdonshire, there may be accessibility restrictions to consider that may hamper the enjoyment of countryside or water related tourism to those with limited mobility. For example, much of the Ouse Valley way is not suitable for those with limited mobility due to the presence of obstacles such as stiles. The Local Plan could investigate whether opportunities exist for enhancing or facilitating tourism and leisure opportunities that might contribute to the economic and social well-being of the district whilst also allowing them to "grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the...leisure industries" (paragraph 86, NPPF).

**7.84** The location of visitor accommodation in Huntingdonshire should also be carefully considered. The preferred location for visitor accommodation is more sustainable when located in town centres as opposed to out of town locations - thus reducing the impact on emissions by providing genuine public transport options for visitors and employees. However, countryside locations for campsites and leisure moorings also need to be addressed ensuring that they provide leisure and recreation opportunities whilst limiting the detrimental impact they may have on our local heritage, countryside, navigation and environment.

### Question 77

#### Tourism opportunities and accommodation

What tourism opportunities should the Local Plan look to promote or enhance and how?

### Question 78

#### Tourism locations

Should any restrictions be placed on the type and location of tourism?

### Question 79

#### Tourist accommodation

What should be the Local Plan's approach to tourist accommodation?



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 8 Developing high quality sustainable communities with supporting infrastructure

- 8.1** The Local Plan has a key role to play in the development of sustainable communities and placemaking. Placemaking is not just about ensuring the design of new buildings are of a high standard, or that they fit within the context of a local area such as a village, it extends much further. Placemaking and the development of sustainable communities must take into account how spaces are used by businesses and residents, how people travel around them or through them and what facilities are required for the community for example public/open spaces, sports and health facilities.
- 8.2** A lack of infrastructure in new developments can mean that people have to travel further for health facilities and recreational space increasing our reliance on the car, our impact on the climate and the health of our population. Likewise a lack of community and village facilities may force more of our residents to lead a more isolated existence impacting on mental and physical health.
- 8.3** Local Plan policies help outline the requirement to secure local infrastructure, facilities and services to enable sustainable development. [Infrastructure Delivery Plans](#) set out clearly a prioritised list of infrastructure needs that would be required from new growth proposed through a local plan. Huntingdonshire District Council needs to evidence and ensure that any infrastructure requirements are balanced with the requirement to provide new housing and employment growth. It must ensure that the financial implications of additional infrastructure requirements do not make the delivery of new developments financially unviable. This infrastructure can be secured through a number of different means including, but not limited to:
- By asking that new items such as open space are designed into new developments through masterplans
  - By applying '[conditions](#)' to planning applications that require the direct delivery of infrastructure such as footpaths, improved connections, crossing points within a development.
  - By creating a [planning obligation](#) (also known as Section 106 agreements) which is attached to the delivery of the development. This is a legal agreement made with the developer and local planning authority to provide financial or other contributions for site related infrastructure.
  - By requiring [Community Infrastructure Levy](#) payments based on the size and type of development which can be used to fund infrastructure that the council, local community and neighbourhoods need
  - By entering into a [Unilateral Undertaking](#) - these can be useful for smaller sites with minimal obligations in terms of time, cost and resourcing to both the developer and the Council. Examples of unilateral undertakings include financial contributions towards wheeled bin provision.
- 8.4** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 developed a series of policies focussed on facilitating high quality sustainable communities with supporting infrastructure. Policies were developed to address issues such as infrastructure delivery, design and placemaking, amenity, sustainable travel and transport, local services and community facilities, and protection of open spaces.
- 8.5** This chapter focuses on a range of issues that used in combination can help to deliver high quality sustainable communities with supporting infrastructure encompassing the subject areas of building design, open space in new development, travel and transport, public transport and active travel infrastructure, parking provision, community facilities and services, and utilities and digital infrastructure.
- 8.6** Although building design is addressed in this chapter, specific issues such as housing density, housing standards such as accessibility requirements, sizes of homes and elderly persons housing needs have been covered in more detail in the chapter 6 'Meeting the housing needs of all'. Measures

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

to address housing in relation to the impacts of climate change and flooding and water related issues are covered in 3 'Responding to the climate crisis'. Likewise services such as local shops have been addressed in 7 'Promoting a prosperous local economy'.

### Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy Feedback

- 8.7** Feedback from engagement on the Huntingdonshire Futures Place Strategy highlighted that infrastructure provision, or more often the lack of it, was seen as a barrier to attracting economic growth and impeding Huntingdonshire's success. Public transport was seen as key to people getting around the district, reducing rural isolation and contributing to net zero aspirations. An integrated approach to footpaths, cycle paths and rights of way was also advocated with routes separated from roads to make cycling and walking more attractive options.

### Issue: Design of buildings and places

- 8.8** The NPPF is clear that creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Building design is an aspect of this with other aspects relating to context, identity, movement around places, public and open spaces, land uses, and green infrastructure. In 2021, MHCLG (now DLUHC) published the [National Design Guide](#) and [National Model Design Code](#) which illustrate how well-designed places that are beautiful, healthy, greener, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice and form part of the Government's collection of planning practice guidance.
- 8.9** Settlement character is hugely influenced by the design of buildings. This character is continually evolving with the types, variety, materials, construction methods and age of buildings playing an important role. Development proposals need to respond to their context. Building design is a key way in which developments can be sustainably integrated into towns and villages as part of wider placemaking principles. It is also

particularly important in shaping how development can be climate resilient to adapt to already changing climatic and weather events creating more resilient communities and economies.

### High quality design

- 8.10** Local Plans are a powerful tool to help ensure that good high quality design is achieved. The Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 has several design policies that strive to create and shape high quality places and building design, these are policies 'LP11 Design Context', 'LP12 Design Implementation', 'LP13 Placemaking' and 'LP14 Amenity'. These policies require development proposals to utilise the [Huntingdonshire Design Guide \(2017\)](#) as well as [conservation area character statements](#) and the [Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape SPD \(2022\)](#) to shape proposals.
- 8.11** Well designed buildings are not only important for their aesthetic value and the contribution they make to the street scene and character of the area but they also provide important functions such as being a place to live, work, socialise and meet day to day needs. Good high quality building design need to <sup>(46)</sup> :
- be safe and accessible for everyone
  - meet the operational functions of the building's function and be affordable to run,
  - be adaptable to meet changing needs,
  - conserve local heritage and reflect local character,
  - be built to a low carbon or net zero carbon standard including through their construction
  - be future proofed by being adaptable to climatic changes such as overheating and flooding responding to the pressures of the area

46 Many of these are covered in greater detail in other issues within this paper

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- be energy efficient and as close to net zero carbon as possible with sequestration and offsetting measures in place
- incorporate biodiversity measures

**8.12** As well as being of high quality design, new development needs to respond to their context and contribute towards strengthening a settlement's identity and character. Development should seek to make somewhere special and distinctive taking cues from their context in doing so. These concepts help to reinforce a sense of place and strengthen the sense of identity of settlements. This is also important for developments that will create new communities such as new settlements or very large urban extensions. Having a clear direction on how a sense of place and identity will be achieved and woven into the site's development is critical in their long term success and in creating vibrant communities.

### Question 80

#### High quality building design

What factors could the Local Plan consider to guide building design and ensure that it is not just high quality and reflective of local character but is also climate resilient and fit for the future?

### Question 81

#### Settlement character and distinctiveness of places

How can the Local Plan strengthen the sense of identity of places?

#### Carbon impact of buildings

- 8.13** Part of developing sustainable buildings is knowing the whole life carbon impact of buildings. This means taking a longer term view of their carbon requirements both in their construction and operationally.
- 8.14** Embodied carbon is the total greenhouse gas emissions (or carbon emissions) generated to construct a building or any other structure. Embodied carbon emissions can arise from the extraction, manufacture, processing, transportation and assembly of elements. Operational carbon arises from the carbon emitted through the use of the building over its entire life, including its end of life demolition and disposal. The less carbon used within all of these aspects reduces the overall whole-life carbon of a building. The sections 'waste and recycling issue' provides additional information on the circular economy approach and the 'energy efficiency and retrofitting issue' section also highlights the importance of reducing the energy demand of buildings.
- 8.15** Making the most of existing buildings by supporting the reuse of buildings or bringing buildings back into use is also important as carbon has already been expended in their construction. This can benefit conservation areas by maintaining the character of an area or street scene. It should be noted however, meeting future changes in building regulations, planning requirements and the needs of the proposed use and future users may in carbon terms be very expensive and emit more overall carbon than through demolition and rebuilding. To determine whether this is the case, an assessment of the whole life carbon of the existing building and the proposed building(s) could be provided to support proposals.
- 8.16** Whole Life Carbon (WLC) Assessments are an assessment of the embodied and operational carbon of a building. Currently, there is no national policy requirement to undertake WLC assessments, nor is it currently within building regulations. However, there are calls for this to change so the national position may change in the coming years. Increasing numbers of local authorities are requiring developments to provide WLC assessments through their local plan policies.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 8.17** The new local plan could require that such an assessment is undertaken to assist in reducing carbon emissions and to make informed decision making on the carbon impact of new buildings. The [Environmental Audit Committee's \(EAC\) report, Building to net zero: costing carbon in construction](#), examined the cost of undertaking an WLC assessment. It found that requiring a WLC assessment may be too onerous for small scale development. Taking this into account, the new local plan could require a Whole Life Carbon assessment for major development schemes and for proposals where demolition over retrofit is sought.

### Question 82

#### Whole life carbon assessments

How should the Local Plan address the carbon impact of buildings?

#### Modern Methods of Construction

- 8.18** There is growing emphasis on how buildings are designed and constructed with new ways of constructing buildings, known as Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). MMC refers to a wide range of construction techniques, encompassing any onsite and offsite techniques that provide alternatives to 'traditional' building methods. It ranges from whole homes being constructed from factory-built volumetric modules and panels and frames, through to the use of innovative techniques for laying concrete blockwork onsite and improvements to site management and productivity. MMC can be used alongside traditional building methods. An example scheme within Huntingdonshire is California Meadows in Huntingdon where 56 affordable units are being built involving timber-framed panels manufactured in factory conditions before being transported to the site and craned into place.

- 8.19** Modules and panels can create less wastage of materials and minimise disruption to local communities by shortening the construction time on site. Studies also show that the resultant carbon emissions are significantly less. An academic study on high-rise and a mid-rise modular scheme in London by Cambridge University and Edinburgh Napier University found that two tower blocks constructed from volumetric modules produced between 41-45% less carbon in their materials and construction. However it must be acknowledged that not all MMC projects will utilise volumetric modules or be of such a large scale. Further research into the carbon reduction of varying scheme types and sizes is being undertaken by [Homes England](#).

- 8.20** There are challenges to delivering MMC units, such as transporting modules and panels to a site could have emissions impacts, be challenging on small rural roads, and craning modules onto site in built up areas could be difficult. Whether MMC methods is cheaper than traditional construction methods will be dependent on viability testing. The Local Plan in its policies could offer support for MMC or seek where it is possible that schemes incorporate some on or off site MMC techniques.

- 8.21** There is also a perception that modular homes will result in 'anywhere' housing with limited variety in designs. This is not necessarily the case and design can still be very high quality and varied so that schemes reflect local character. In these cases, it may be that instead of volumetric units, MMC techniques such as panels or process changes in how sites are managed can be undertaken.

### Question 83

#### Modern Methods of Construction

Should the Local Plan support MMC within design policies and seek MMC within site allocations?

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Issue: Open space in new development

- 8.22** Open and green spaces in new development benefit the community by creating a sense of identity, belonging and happiness, whilst also providing both physical and mental benefits, opportunities for social interaction and reducing stress across all age groups<sup>(47)</sup> The Fields in Trust [Revaluing Parks and Greenspaces \(2019\)](#) also notes that parks and greenspaces are estimated to save the NHS around £111 million per year by reducing the number of visits to GP through their health benefits. Green open spaces can also contribute to increasing biodiversity and establish ecological networks across settlements helping to provide climate change benefits, and connecting people to the environment and creating sustainable communities.
- 8.23** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) introduced planning policies that require developers to provide or financially contribute to the provision of open spaces, guide the design of new developments and also protect against the loss of open space, outdoor recreation facilities, allotments and areas of garden land that provide amenity value<sup>(48)</sup>.
- 8.24** The [Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD](#) provides guidance on the design and layout of public and open spaces and the [Developer Contributions SPD](#) provides more detailed information on the requirements for new developments including the quantity of required for parks and gardens, natural and semi-natural green space, children's play space, allotments and community gardens etc. More recently the Council has produced a [Healthy Open Spaces Strategy](#) to ensure that Huntingdonshire's open spaces continue to be used and valued by communities and to explore how they can support wider positive change.



- 8.25** Covid lockdowns brought to the forefront the importance of accessible green space to residents. Huntingdonshire District Council's 2020 [Healthy Open Spaces Strategy](#) surveyed residents in the district asking why they visit green space (residents were able to choose more than one option): 40% said it was to experience nature, 46% to access children's play provision, 37% to stay fit and healthy, 53% use green space to go for a walk and 38% to relax.
- 8.26** The design of green spaces in new development should also be carefully considered to maximise the number of members of our communities who can benefit from them. For example, older people when surveyed stressed the need for additional facilities such as car parks, toilets and cafes which promote accessibility and support longer visits. Facilities such as these may need to be considered for larger green spaces, such as those located in major developments.
- 8.27** It is important to note that sample site visits also identified a noticeable gap in provision for people with disabilities and additional needs. "Community engagement has highlighted requests for a changing place, disability play provision and improve pathway networks. Targeted engagement and partnership working needs to be undertaken to address this shortfall and

47 RTPI Research Paper: [Settlement Patterns, Urban Form & Sustainability](#) - An Evidence Review (May 2018)

48 Policies LP 4 Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery, LP 11 Design Context, LP 12 Design Implementation, LP 13 Placemaking, LP 32 Protection of Open Space



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

look for innovative and inclusive approaches that ensure everyone can enjoy Huntingdonshire's parks, open spaces and play areas" [Healthy Open Spaces Strategy](#) 2020.

### Question 84

#### Open space standards and types

What do open spaces in new developments currently lack, are there additional standards or types of open space that the Local Plan should consider?

- 8.28** Open spaces are not reserved for residential developments, they can also benefit workers and businesses in the district. Likewise open spaces take many forms, for example town squares, community orchards and allotments, natural green spaces to promote biodiversity, children's play spaces, Multi-Use Games Areas<sup>(49)</sup> and trim trails (outdoor gym equipment). These can all contribute to improving people's health and well-being.
- 8.29** The provision of open spaces in new developments needs to be balanced with the need for other infrastructure requirements such as community and health facilities and affordable housing to name but a few. Depending on the size and requirements of developments this means that open space provision and size can sometimes vary across new developments.

### Question 85

#### Open spaces in new developments

Should the approach to open space provision in new developments be different depending on the type of development proposed?

### Issue: Travel and transport

- 8.30** Motorised transport for many is the only means of travelling to work or accessing key services, leisure and recreational opportunities. Inefficient transport networks can lead to congestion, increasing emissions and making access to education and employment more difficult. New transport infrastructure can open up opportunities for business links and residential growth in sustainable locations.
- 8.31** In July 2021 the Government published [Decarbonising transport: a better, greener Britain](#), the Plan sets out commitments and the actions needed to 'decarbonise the entire transport system in the UK'. The strategic priorities focus on accelerating modal shift to public and active transport; decarbonising road transport; decarbonising how we get our goods; reframing the UK as a hub for green transport technology and innovation; creating place-based solutions to emissions reduction and reducing carbon in a global economy.
- 8.32** Transport is managed by a variety of organisations, locally, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, (CPCA) and Cambridgeshire County Council are responsible for delivering transport infrastructure, large scale strategic road projects such as the A14 upgrade are dealt with by National Highways. The CPCA is responsible for delivering a Local Transport Plan

49 MUGA: facilities design to allow a number of different sports to be played due to the features of the flooring used and the different line markings on the surface.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

for the area, it can address existing transport challenges and set policies and strategies to ensure that planned large-scale development can take place in the county in a sustainable way.

- 8.33** Huntingdonshire has very good connections to the national and regional strategic road network including the A14, A1 and A1(M), A428, A141, A1123, A1096, A1198 and A605. In terms of rail travel, the district is bisected by the East Coast mainline railway and is served by railway stations at Huntingdon and St Neots providing services south to London St Pancras International and onwards to the south coast and north to Peterborough where onward connections run north to Edinburgh.
- 8.34** Huntingdonshire is also home to some active airfields such as [Conington](#) and Little Staughton, and navigable waterways provide leisure travel routes around the district with several marinas facilitating long and short stays along with boat servicing and maintenance. The River Great Ouse provides a major route through St Neots, Huntingdon and St Ives and the River Nene provides routes around the northern edge of the district. The [Middle Level Navigations](#) offer a network of Fenland leisure routes.
- 8.35** This section addresses motorised forms of transport and travel in the district, public transport and active travel are addressed in the section 'Issue: Public transport and active travel infrastructure'
- 8.36** Transport infrastructure is a major influence on the ability to deliver the development strategy within Huntingdonshire. Upgrades to transport infrastructure can influence where sites may be allocated and where development may be more sustainable. [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) policy LP 16 Sustainable Travel asks that developments ensure that any potential impacts on the strategic road network have been addressed; and that there are no severe residual cumulative impacts.
- 8.37** A number of documents helped shaped the development of this approach including reference to wider strategic documents and policies such as the [Cambridgeshire County Council](#) Local Transport Plan and Long Term Transport Strategy and Investment Plan, and Market Towns Transport Strategies (now undertaken by [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority](#)) and the [Huntingdonshire Strategic Transport Study 2017](#). Work is currently underway to develop a new [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#).
- 8.38** Improvements to the A14 resulted in the opening of a new carriageway section in May 2020 and the previous route was reclassified as the A1307. The Pathfinder Link Road now connects the eastern section of A1307 into Huntingdon ring road and the junction of Edison Bell Way near the railway station reducing congestion.
- 8.39** Further transport projects are also underway. A [Development Consent Order](#)<sup>(50)</sup> to upgrade the A428 between the Black Cat Roundabout on the A1 and the Caxton Gibbet on the A428 was granted by the Secretary of State for Transport in August 2022. The proposal will upgrade the A428 route between the Black Cat roundabout on the A1 and the Caxton Gibbet roundabout at the junction of the A428 with an aim to reduce congestion between Milton Keynes to Cambridge
- 8.40** The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is also moving forward on scheme to reduce congestion and delays on the A141; a main route from the Fens and a crucial transport link for the Huntingdon and St Ives area. An Outline Business Case is being developed for the scheme. The CPCA's [Option Assessment Report A141 and St Ives Transport Study July 2020](#) also showed that four of the seven junctions in the A141 study area were approaching capacity or operating over capacity during at least one peak period prior to the opening of the Huntingdon Southern bypass (page 30).

50 A type of planning application for major infrastructure projects.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 8.41** East West Rail is a major project which aims to deliver rail connections and improvements between Milton Keynes, Oxford, Bedford and Cambridge by creating new railway infrastructure between Bedford and Cambridge and a station to the South of St Neots. This could help to more efficiently join up Huntingdonshire with the wider knowledge economy increasing economic productivity, complementary business opportunities and increase access to jobs and employees.

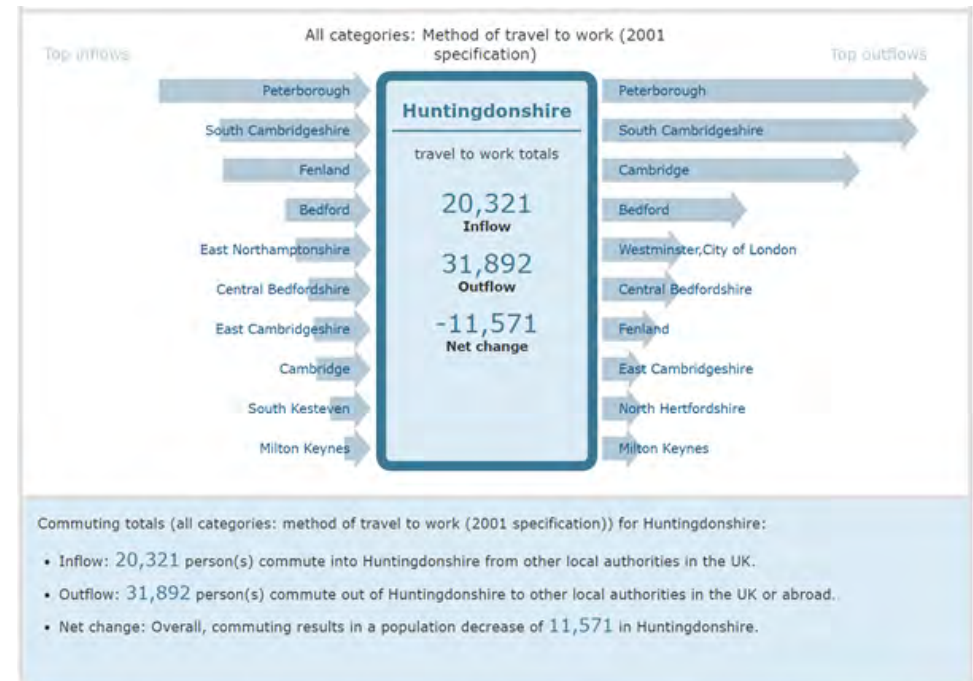
### Question 86

#### Strategic transport improvements

What benefits and opportunities will there be for Huntingdonshire and its residents following further strategic transport improvements?

- 8.42** The number of people living and working in Huntingdonshire was 40,861 as at the Census 2011 ([WU01UK - Location of usual residence and place of work by sex](#)). The 2011 Census shows a commuting outflow from the district of 31,892 workers, with 20,321 workers commuting in to the district. The main mode of travel is by car/van (17,527 inflow, 24,967 outflow).
- 8.43** The main destination for out-commuting for work purposes for Huntingdonshire residents was Peterborough (6,026 workers), however 3,843 Peterborough workers travel into Huntingdonshire for work purposes.
- 8.44** The main destination for those aged 16 to 34 is Peterborough closely followed by South Cambridgeshire, this is reversed in the 35 to 74 age group where South Cambridgeshire is the main destination for work.

**Figure 8.1 Commuting Flow - Census 2011**



Source: ONS, Census WU03UK - Location of usual residence and place of work by method of travel to work

See more visualisations by Nomis

Source: NOMIS, [2011 Census](#): Location of usual residence and place of work by method of travel to work

Due to the time of data collection for the 2021 Census, with reduced commuting due to the pandemic, further work will be required to understand new shifts in travel to work habits.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 8.45** The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) produces annual statistics on territorial carbon dioxide emissions by local authority.<sup>(51)</sup> Huntingdonshire's share of these emissions has declined from 2100 Kt in 2005 to 1597 Kt in 2019. Transport comprises a particularly high proportion of the district's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at 44% of the 2019 total reflecting the presence of the A1, A14 and East Coast mainline railways running through the district. The BEIS also publish data reflecting emissions which are within the scope of influence of local authorities which excludes very large industrial sites, railways, motorways and land use. When these figures are reviewed the emissions from transport in 2019 fell from 708 Kt to 544 Kt reflecting the high volume of long distance road and rail transport which traverses Huntingdonshire.
- 8.46** Many authorities are now starting to focus on reducing emissions by investigating options such as first and last mile journeys to transport hubs and linking of transport / hubs to business sites. A good example of collaborative work undertaken to influence commuting flow by car or van can be seen through the relocation of Cambridgeshire County Council to the New Shire Hall at Alconbury Weald. As a result, two new shuttle bus services were created to help staff from the County Council and other Alconbury businesses travel to Huntingdon Bus Station and a new express service to Cambridge.

### Question 87

#### Transport and travel

What are the main issues that the Local Plan should investigate to improve transport and travel in the district, reduce travel-related carbon emissions, increase people's quality of life and support businesses?

### Issue: Public transport and active travel infrastructure

- 8.47** Climate change is now at the forefront of the world and government agenda. The NPPF encourages Local Authorities to reduce emissions through promoting a move towards public instead of private transport and through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes (paragraph 105). For those on low incomes and people with disabilities or mobility problems public transport provides a means for social interaction, access to leisure and essential services, such as retail and health.
- 8.48** Providing active travel opportunities is also at the forefront of the Government agenda leading to the establishment of [Active Travel England](#) designed to "deliver priorities for a healthy, safe and carbon-neutral transport system"<sup>(52)</sup>.
- 8.49** Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 introduced a planning policy on Sustainable Travel (Policy [LP 16](#)). The policy asked that new development contribute to maximising sustainable travel modes and that public rights of way and non-motorised user routes for example, pedestrian, cycling and equestrian routes within a development are protected or enhanced. The Local Plan's strategy for development also seeks to direct development to areas where sustainable travel modes and public transport are well provided for and design and parking policies address issues cycle parking and shower facilities for non-residential buildings.
- 8.50** A number of documents helped shaped the development of this approach including reference to wider strategic documents and policies such as the [Cambridgeshire County Council](#) Local Transport Plan and Long Term Transport Strategy and Investment Plan, and Market Towns Transport Strategies (now undertaken by [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority](#)). Work is currently underway to develop a new [Local Transport](#)

51 The figures exclude aviation, shipping and military transport for which there is no obvious basis for allocation to local areas.

52 [Written statement to Parliament New executive agency Active Travel England launches](#), 24 January 2022

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

[and Connectivity Plan](#). The [National Model Design Code](#) and The [National Design Guide](#) also provides guidance on the network of streets, active travel, and public transport.

- 8.51** Huntingdonshire is served by two railway stations located in Huntingdon and St Neots as part of the East Coast Mainline Railway. Huntingdon: A Prospectus for Growth published by the District Council in 2020 recognises the importance of the proposal to add a railway station at Alconbury Weald and join it to the national rail network and acknowledges the challenges of doing so. [East West Rail](#) also proposes a new rail route from Bedford to Cambridge. A preferred broad route was identified in 2021 including suggestions for a new railway station south of St Neots. This could increase economic and leisure opportunities for businesses, workers and residents in Huntingdonshire. The delivery of these schemes are currently uncertain.
- 8.52** The provision of a new link and location of stations will be the ultimate responsibility of East West Rail and outside the control of Huntingdonshire District Council, the Local Plan could harness the potential of rail travel in a variety of ways including, but not limited to increasing residential or business density around stations, linking new communities to stations or establishing new developments near to new stations.

### Question 88

#### Rail travel

How can the Local Plan enable residents, businesses and workers to take advantage of the opportunities provided by current and future rail travel in or close to the district?

- 8.53** The Cambridgeshire Guided Busway runs within the district linking Cambridge to St Ives and Huntingdon with supplementary connections to Peterborough and several villages. The continuing service from St Ives to Huntingdon leaves the guided busway resulting in a less direct journey with extended travel times.
- 8.54** Bus services in the district to rural areas are less frequent or lack provision completely. It must not be forgotten however that Huntingdonshire is a largely rural district and that cuts and reductions in public transport over the years may have resulted in limited public transport options for many settlements, as stated in [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) "even in the market towns public transport outside of weekday business hours can be limited. Therefore reliance on private cars as the main mode of travel is likely to continue." (paragraph 5.53).
- 8.55** The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority commenced an on-demand bus service trial - TING (now [Vectare](#)) to provide additional service to the less well connected area of West Huntingdonshire; the permanency of this provision is yet to be confirmed. Local Plans can ensure increased sustainability of the district in a variety of ways such as making sure that new developments are located near to public transport, thus increasing the potential usage of public transport and the potential for the retention of these services, or by asking that new development provides opportunities for people to use public transport for example, by securing agreements to facilitate new bus stops or designing a development so that there is a short pedestrian path to the nearest bus stop.

### Question 89

#### Public transport

How can the Local Plan facilitate and encourage the provision of and access to public transport?



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 8.56** Active travel comes in many forms including cycling, walking and horse riding. The active travel routes such as footpaths, cycleways, bridleways and public rights of ways provide connectivity to allow people to access work, leisure, sport and recreational opportunities, school, access to services and healthcare and shopping. Such routes may be used for both leisure and practical purposes but whatever the nature of the use active travel in all forms can offer health benefits for the people involved and environmental benefits from a lack of greenhouse gas emissions. It must not be forgotten that active travel routes are also used by those with disabilities and limited mobility so designs need to facilitate use by a wide range of users. Improvements in technology have also seen the introduction of electric bikes and scooters helping some users to travel further than they might otherwise have done.
- 8.57** Huntingdonshire District Council must consider how all forms of active travel can be incorporated into new developments and create safe routes for all users. Cambridgeshire County Council's [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#), identifies cycling and walking infrastructure improvements for future investment in the short, medium and long term and makes the case for future funding for walking and cycling infrastructure, which could help to provide additional evidence when developing local planning policies and strategies for growth.

### Question 90

#### Active travel infrastructure

What can the Local Plan do to help promote and provide active travel in new developments?

### Issue: Parking provision

- 8.58** Local Plans must take into account the need for parking provision and vehicle movement (motorised and non-motorised) in the formulation of policies to guide development. This should be balanced, creating a strategy that responds to local conditions, access to public transport and the requirements of emerging technologies in response to climate change e.g. the uptake in electric vehicles. The [National Model Design Code](#) and The [National Design Guide](#) provides guidance on how to address parking, servicing and utilities infrastructure for all users.
- 8.59** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) contains policy LP 17 Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement, the aims of which are to ensure that new developments provide space for vehicle movements including for service (e.g. refuse lorries) and emergency vehicles. It also sets out minimum parking requirements for people with disabilities, cycle parking facilities and directs development proposals to the [Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD](#) to establish locally specific parking provision for motorised vehicles for residential and non residential developments. As part of the Local Plan preparation the Council also commissioned a series of [Huntingdonshire Strategic Transport Studies](#) to understand the local context with regard to transport, travel, movement and car ownership.
- 8.60** The [Huntingdonshire Strategic Transport Study - Baseline Report](#) highlights that the district experiences high levels of car ownership due to its rural nature and limited access to public transport in small and rural communities. Huntingdon has the lowest level of car ownership and of the four market towns, Ramsey has the highest level of car ownership. Across the district car ownership levels were 1.5 cars per household<sup>(53)</sup>. It is also noted that 80% of commuting trips were made by car<sup>(54)</sup>.

53 Average Cars per Household Huntingdon: 1.2, St Neots: 1.3, St Ives: 1.3, Ramsey 1.4, Huntingdonshire: 1.5 (Source: Census 2011) page 5.

54 [Huntingdonshire Strategic Transport Study - Baseline Report](#), page 58

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 8.61** It is important to note that some historic settlements and developments in Huntingdonshire do not provide off street parking, in some cases this can cause conflict with other users such as cyclists and pedestrians and congestion. Lack of public transport to work and leisure opportunities also increases the need for private vehicles. The design of parking whether for residential or non-residential e.g. business, retailers, tourism destinations and holiday accommodation should also be considered in the design of successful developments, as should the increase in electric vehicles such as cars, e-scooters and e-bikes, and increases in people cycling to work. The [National Model Design Code](#) and The [National Design Guide](#) and NPPF (paragraph 107 e) also asks that electric vehicle spaces and charging points be considered, including, placement location and design.

### Question 91

#### Parking provision

What are the key priorities that should be addressed when considering parking provision in residential and non-residential developments e.g. business, retailers, leisure destinations and tourist accommodation?

- 8.62** The logistics and distribution sector is also changing as a result of the impacts of Brexit, with more companies looking for locations to expand into this industry. The National Planning Policy Framework requires that Local Plans should address provision for heavy goods vehicles, such as overnight lorry parking facilities and the parking requirements for new or expanded distribution centres ([NPPF](#), paragraph 109).

### Question 92

#### Heavy goods vehicle parking

Is there is an issue with overnight lorry parking in your area and where? What approach should the Local Plan take to heavy goods vehicle parking?

### Issue: Community facilities and services

- 8.63** The NPPF highlights that social and cultural well-being should be taken into account to help achieve the principles of sustainable development and that prosperous and rural economies should enable the retention and development of "accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship" (Paragraph 84 d). Community services and facilities also include schools, GP surgeries/health providers, village halls, pavilions, libraries and public houses and are valued assets which support sustainable communities.
- 8.64** Open spaces is addressed in 'Issue: Open space in new development' , retail and shopping facilities are covered in 'Issue: Retail and adapting our town centres'. You can also comment on locally specific issues can be made also in the section 5 'Supporting our places'.
- 8.65** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) includes policy LP4 Contributing to infrastructure which sets (out alongside the [Developer Contributions SPD](#)) what developers are required to provide in new developments regarding community facilities. In addition, the Local Plan seeks to protect the loss of community facilities and make provision for new community facilities through policy LP 22 Local Services and Community Facilities. The Council commissioned an [Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Sports and Leisure Facilities Strategy](#) to inform what community and sports facilities would be

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

required as a result of planned growth. A Playing Pitch Strategy and Leisure Built Facility Strategy is nearing completion which to inform future need in the district.

- 8.66** Community Centres, village halls, other halls - such as church/faith halls or Scout huts and libraries - are vital meeting places. They provide indoor space for a variety of purposes, such as access to learning, parish meetings, sports activities, community support groups as well as other social events throughout the year. Community facility provision is changing, moving towards the co-location of multiple services or self-help provision which is becoming more common e.g. health clinics, parent and toddler groups, sports / function hall facilities and computer facilities whereby people can 'self-help'<sup>(55)</sup>. The Local Plan will have to consider what format of community facility can be achieved, balance this with other infrastructure requirements in new developments and what can be viably achieved whilst still delivering new homes and jobs.
- 8.67** Public Houses are also considered community facilities providing a 'hub' where people can gather and share ideas and trades, meet new people and socialise. The benefits of public houses and their retention are also supported through paragraph 84d of the NPPF. Since 2012 the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) [What Pub? webpage](#) reported that 29 pubs across 14 parishes had closed in the district (data as of April 2022) . As of April 2022 CAMRA also reported that there were 155 pubs in the district.
- 8.68** A lack of access to healthcare services such as hospitals and doctors surgeries can "lead rural patients to experience poorer health outcomes than those living in urban areas. [In addition] Healthcare facilities which serve rural and dispersed populations can struggle to attract GP trainees, and face challenges in providing healthcare over a wide geographical area"<sup>(56)</sup>. This highlights the importance of access to health services, the

further residents have to travel to access these facilities, the greater the risk that residents will experience poorer health outcomes leading to health inequality across the district. In contrast the location of health services in rural locations may not be cost efficient or sustainable for providers, meaning a balance needs to be made between viable provision and access to services, this is especially pertinent to Huntingdonshire, which is a predominantly rural district.

- 8.69** The NHS actively promotes the [benefits of sport and exercise](#) lowering the risk of long-term (chronic) conditions and improving mental health. The [Ordnance Survey National Greenspace Map](#) recorded 19 Bowling Greens, 10 Golf Courses, 36 'Other Sports Facilities, 88 Playing fields and 17 Tennis Courts across the district. (April 2022). The One Leisure centres in Huntingdon, Ramsey, St Ives and St Neots provide a larger range of indoor and outdoor sports and leisure activities. Huntingdonshire also has 12 swimming pools<sup>(57)</sup>. The balance of large scale sports provision with adequate access to rural sports facilities will be investigated further through updated evidence in the form of a Playing Pitch and a Built Leisure Facilities Strategy. The Local Plan will have to consider what types of sports facilities are needed in the district, balancing this with other infrastructure requirements in new developments and what can be viably achieved whilst still delivering new homes and jobs.
- 8.70** As of March 2022, there were [33 Assets of Community Value](#) including facilities such as public houses, sports and open spaces, community halls and local shops and post offices. This represents important community assets that local communities wish to retain in their settlement and provides the opportunity for community groups to register their interest as a potential bidder if the asset comes up for sale, delaying a sale on the open market and providing the opportunity for community purchase to maintain the asset.

55 'Source: [My Community](#)

56 page 38, [The RTPI Research Paper: Settlement Patterns, Urban Form & Sustainability - An Evidence Review \(May 2018\)](#)

57 5 in Huntingdon and 1 in each of Buckden, Godmanchester, Kimbolton, Ramsey, Sawtry, St Ives and St Neots, some require club membership or belong to schools others are provided through Huntingdonshire's One Leisure centres

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 93

#### Protecting and enhancing community services and facilities

How can the Local Plan help protect or enhance new community facilities in your area or the district?

### Question 94

#### Community services and facilities and healthy sustainable new communities

What community facilities are important to provide healthy and sustainable new communities in your area and for the district?

### Issue: Utilities and digital infrastructure

**8.71** To ensure any new growth in Huntingdonshire meets the principles of sustainable development, the Council will have to ensure that it can be supported by the appropriate utilities and digital infrastructure. Much of this infrastructure such as telecommunication and information technology networks, energy (gas, electricity, renewable etc.), water supply, water management (sewerage and drainage) is provided by private companies. When developing the new Local Plan and identifying locations for growth the Council must ensure that adequate infrastructure is in place to support the growth or existing and new communities.

**8.72** The local plan can ask for contributions (physical and financial) towards infrastructure, it can also identify specific requirements for infrastructure in new development. The Council has to work with other local authorities and infrastructure providers to assess the availability and capacity of infrastructure and if it can meet the demands of growth.

**8.73** Specific issues related to the generation water supply and management is addressed in 'Issue: Energy efficiency and retrofitting', as is energy and heat generation in new homes and businesses. This chapter addresses any remaining infrastructure requirements and digital infrastructure.

**8.74** To identify if adequate infrastructure was in place or in the pipeline the Council commissioned an [Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Schedule](#) which looked at infrastructure such as water, wastewater, electricity and gas. The Plan and schedule established a baseline of provision, determined infrastructure needed across the district to support planned growth; estimated cost, funding sources and delivery timings including which organisations are responsible for delivering the infrastructure. This enabled the Council to develop policies such as [LP 4 Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery](#) which alongside a [Developer Contributions SPD](#) set out what infrastructure is required from new developments. This was then tested to ensure the approach was viable and deliverable.

**8.75** During the development of the new Local Plan the council will have to ensure that appropriate utilities such as telecommunication and information technology networks, energy (gas, electricity, renewable etc.), water supply, water management (sewerage and drainage) can be provided at the right time to support new development and that the solutions chosen are viable enough to still enable development. This will involve an understanding of the utility providers, timing and cost of infrastructure and a knowledge of current and future capacity. Increasingly on the agenda are also opportunities to provide utilities infrastructure that can work towards net carbon/zero carbon targets to tackle climate change including opportunities to promote [heat networks](#) and renewable energy generation.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 8.76** The Council will have a number of decisions to make in consultation with its residents, workers and business concerning the location and size of new planned growth. Growth take many forms for example it could be located close to or within areas which have existing utilities infrastructure, or be situated as a stand-alone new development. In some cases existing infrastructure may have enough capacity to support growth, however in other cases capacity may need to be increased at existing facilities or new facilities provided.

### Question 95

#### Utilities challenges

What are the the biggest challenges facing the provision of utilities infrastructure in Huntingdonshire? What could the Local Plan do to overcome them?

### Question 96

#### Utilities infrastructure

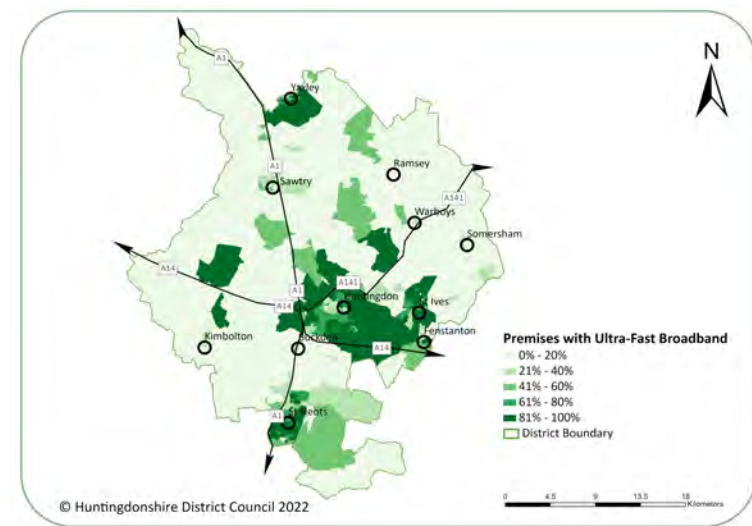
Are there other types of utilities infrastructure including renewables that the Local Plan should take into consideration in developing policies to guide development and when considering locations for growth?

- 8.77** As a rural district fast, reliable mobile and internet connections allow those in isolated locations to access online services, such as banking and retail, enables home working and social interaction especially for those where mobility may be a barrier. Economic success across the district also relies on employers and commercial operations having high quality

connections to mobile and broadband infrastructure, maximising opportunities for productivity, efficiency and increased access to markets. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority produced '[Connecting Cambridgeshire Delivering a Digital Connectivity Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough 2018 -2022](#)' (2018)' which aims to capitalise on these benefits by providing more reliable infrastructure across the county.

- 8.78** The most recent data from Ofcom (2019) demonstrates that the rollout of Ultra-Fast broadband connections is mostly centred around the more urban areas in the district. Whilst Ultra-Fast broadband is not readily available in rural areas, some rollout has occurred.

**Map 8.1 Percentage of properties with Ultra-Fast Broadband**



Source: Ofcom: [Connected Nations update: Spring 2019](#) - Fixed Local and Unitary Authority Data



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 97

#### Broadband connectivity

How should greater provision for effective digital connections be planned for and provided as part of new development, what should the plan focus on?

- 8.79** Mobile phone coverage can be patchy and limited in rural locations. The Government is working towards delivering 4G indoor coverage, however a short survey conducted amongst a sample of businesses identified a negative financial impact of between £100 to £250 per month to those who experience poor mobile signals<sup>(58)</sup>.
- 8.80** Ofcom's [Connected Nations update: Spring 2019](#) shows that indoor 4G coverage with an adequate choice of providers has not yet been fully implemented across the whole of Huntingdonshire, limiting the cost options available to residents. The percentage of geographic area in Huntingdonshire that can receive a 4G signal (indoor) from all operators is 68.92% , 21.24% from 3 operators, 8.82% from 2 operators and 0.99% from 1 operator.

### Question 98

#### Mobile connectivity

How should greater provision for effective mobile connections be planned for and provided as part of new development, what should the plan focus on?

## 9 Distributing new growth

- 9.1** The Local Plan is not just concerned with delivering housing. The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (paragraph 20) requires that Local Plans must set out "an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for" housing, employment, retail, leisure, other commercial development, infrastructure, community facilities and the natural and built environment, whilst addressing climate change.
- 9.2** The Local Plan should ensure that new growth follows the principles of sustainable development "At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" ([NPPE](#), paragraph 7). This not only means placing locations for growth where employment, services and facilities are easily accessible, but also helping to support more rural communities by enabling growth to provide additional services and facilities to support growing populations.
- 9.3** In addition the Local Plan will have to allocate varying sizes of sites and at least 10% of the final agreed housing requirement should be on sites no larger than one hectare ([NPPE](#), paragraph 69). Policies will also have to guide where all types of development can reasonably be located for any planning applications that are submitted which are not set out as allocated sites<sup>(59)</sup>, this is called windfall development.
- 9.4** [Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036](#) concentrates development in locations which provide, or have the potential to provide, the most comprehensive range of services and facilities. Substantial new development is focused in two strategic expansion locations - Alconbury Weald and St Neots East, which are of a scale that can create successful, functioning new communities. Approximately three quarters of the objectively assessed

<sup>58</sup> [Department for Culture Media and Sport: Mobile Infrastructure Projects Impacts and Benefits Report \(July 2017\)](#), Pages 11 and 10

<sup>59</sup> Allocated sites are sites that are identified in the Local Plan as suitable for specific types of development.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

need for housing<sup>(60)</sup> and the majority of employment and retail growth is expected to be focused in the spatial planning areas of Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey and approximately a quarter of the objectively assessed need for housing, together with a limited amount of employment growth, is expected to be permitted on sites dispersed across key service centres and small settlements to support the vitality of these communities and provide flexibility and diversity in the housing and employment supply.

**9.5** The Huntingdonshire Settlement Hierarchy Methodology 2023 sets out the Council's proposed methodology for the assessment of the sustainability of settlements within Huntingdonshire to aid in the establishment of a settlement hierarchy for the next Local Plan. The document details the Council's justification for the assessment criteria, the results of which will form part of evidence base for the Local Plan. The Council invited the public in March 2023 to comment on the methodology which will ultimately guide the Council in determining the distribution and location of growth across the district.

**9.6** Once agreed the methodology will be used to assess the sustainability of settlements contributing towards the assessment of where new growth should go. This could be in areas which have sufficient services, employment, infrastructure to support residents and businesses, or to areas where additional growth could help contribute to the provision of additional services to make a settlement more sustainable e.g. additional housing of a size that can provide additional community facilities, primary school, health care facilities etc.

**9.7** Local Plans apply a variety of approaches to distributing growth (housing, employment, green infrastructure etc) across their respective local authority areas. These can include a combination of the following and will be tested to ensure they meet the principles of sustainable development:

- Creating new settlements usually located around important infrastructure such as rail and road networks.

- Expansion on the edge of existing urban areas.
- Densification of existing urban areas.
- Creation of 'satellite settlements' around existing urban areas.
- Expansion of existing sustainable settlements such as market towns.
- Proportionate growth/expansion of existing settlements, such as villages to allow for growing communities.
- Development in areas in proximity to public transport corridors or road networks.
- Dispersed development for example, allocation of smaller sites across all or the majority of settlements.
- Continuing a development strategy approach set out in current Local Plans.
- Focussing development in settlements with the highest level of sustainability for example access to services and employment.
- Regeneration of existing sites.

**9.8** The Council must carefully assess different approaches to growth, understanding the sustainability impacts including the environmental, social and environmental and climate change considerations. Enough land needs to be identified to meet the growth in the population and economy looking ahead a minimum of 15 years and any large scale developments such as new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages will have to set a vision that looks ahead at least 30 years (paragraph 22, [NPPF](#)). In addition the Local Plan will have to allocate varying sizes of sites and at least 10% of the final agreed housing requirement should be on sites no larger than one hectare ([NPPF](#), paragraph 69). This means that a careful balance of large and small sites will need to be assessed and identified.

**9.9** The strategy for development may also have to take into account the needs of the local population, for example providing sites to allow for those who grew up in small settlements can stay in their community if they wish to do so, but also return to where they grew up if they need to return to live closer to relatives and provide support.

60 A method previously used by planning authorities to assess how much housing is required over a set period to accommodate the growth in population in an area.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Question 99

#### Distribution of new growth

Do you think that all reasonable development scenarios have been identified? If not what alternatives should also be considered?

### Question 100

#### Growth scenarios

What development scenarios do you think are suitable for Huntingdonshire and what should be avoided and why?

### Issue: What factors should we take into account?

**9.10** Once a strategy for development is established the Council will look broadly at the most appropriate locations for growth. A number of studies to understand constraints to development will be produced on topics such as:

- Flooding
- Water resources and management
- Infrastructure
- Transport impacts
- Employment needs
- Identification of areas of green infrastructure, landscape, biodiversity and heritage value

**9.11** The Local Plan must carefully balance the need for growth with the impacts that growth may have on existing infrastructure, the natural environment, climate change. It must also recognise that sustainable development means consideration of economic, social and environmental objectives (paragraph 8, [NPPE](#)). For example Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036, did not allocate Wyton airfield for redevelopment due to the impact that this would have on traffic and congestion in the vicinity; this approach was informed by the [Huntingdonshire Strategic Transport Study - Development Scenario Comparative Assessment \(May 2017\)](#).

**9.12** This highlights the importance of identifying and carefully assessing the constraints that may affect the size and location of growth and the factors that must be considered to enable sustainable development whilst also meeting the needs of a growing population and economy.

### Question 101

#### Development constraints

Do you think all reasonable constraints have been identified? What other constraints should be considered when looking at broad locations for growth?

**9.13** When identifying new specific sites for development, whether it be housing, employment, mixed uses, green infrastructure etc, the Council must be sure that the sites identified are suitable for development. The first stage of this process was to issue a 'call for sites', which is where the Council asked the public, businesses, developers and landowners to submit sites that they believe are suitable for development or allocation for a specific purpose. The Council will judge the sites against a list of criteria to give a consistent assessment of their potential.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

- 9.14** The Government currently assesses the delivery of homes via two tests, [the Five Year Housing Land Supply and Housing Delivery Test](#). The first seeks to ensure there is adequate housing likely to be delivered in the next five years and the second looks at whether housing targets have been met over the previous three years. If the Local Authority fails to meet these tests, policies in the Local Plan that guide sustainable development and address local issues cannot be fully applied; instead planning applications for new development are assessed using the NPPF.
- 9.15** Some communities or settlements in Huntingdonshire have experienced this in the past and voiced their concern that the development proposed is inappropriate or lacks sufficient infrastructure or services to benefit the new community, evidence of this can be found through the [comments received on planning applications](#).
- 9.16** This means that the Council must firstly ensure it can provide enough sites for development (the minimum housing target is set through the Government's [Standard Method calculation](#), employment is determined through local plan evidence documents produced by or on behalf of the Council) and that the sites can be delivered in a timely manner.
- 9.17** Therefore, in order to ensure there are sufficient sites to meet these targets the Council has to carefully consider the suitability of all sites put forward by residents, landowners, businesses and developers and decide whether they are suitable for development, or if they can be made suitable for development through the provision of additional infrastructure or mitigation measures that are achievable.
- 9.18** Once sites are chosen the Local Plan will set criteria for development which may include requirements for a certain number of homes, employment floorspace, provision of infrastructure such as sports and community facilities, or natural green space and what infrastructure such as a primary school is needed to support that development.
- 9.19** A number of strategies for development have been developed over the years including, but not limited to, the garden cities and villages, eco towns, healthy new towns and 20 minute neighbourhoods, co-working facilities, new climate friendly business clusters. All are focussed on providing sustainable development which meet economic, social and environmental objectives. The approach taken through the Local Plan will need to consider what constitutes a good development e.g. active travel routes, zero carbon homes, accessible employment and public transport. This requires a viability assessment which demonstrates what can be realistically achieved, providing a balance between the growth required, achieving sustainable development, addressing climate change and ensuring that the land is available for development at the right time.

### Question 102

#### Priorities for new developments

What priorities should be considered when allocating new development?

### Question 103

#### Development concepts

What development concepts would enable the creation of sustainable communities appropriate for Huntingdonshire?

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 10 Next steps

- 10.1** Thank you for providing feedback on the issues that are important to you, our local community and the district. All responses will be published on our [Consultation Portal](#). This will include your name and organisation (if any) but will not include any contact details. You can change the frequency with which you receive emails, or opt out altogether, if you wish to on our Consultation Portal. Please ensure that you respond by **XXXXXX**. Your comments will also be summarised in our Statement of Consultation which will be published on our [webpages](#).
- 10.2** If you think that we have missed something or there is a further issue you would like to raise please answer the question below.

#### Question 104

##### Is there anything we have missed?

Please let us know if there is an issue important to you that we have missed that we should consider when preparing the Local Plan.

- 10.3** This Issues Engagement Paper is the first stage in starting to shape the policies in the our future Local Plan update. Following this engagement, all the comments received will be read thoroughly and different opinions on issues considered and balanced against each other and the evidence and technical studies which we will continue to gather. All these together, along with responses received to other engagement opportunities such as our Call for Sites, will shape preparation of the next engagement opportunities on the Local Plan update which will be the 'Further Issues and Options'. This will tell you what we have found out and present you with any more

issues that have not been identified in this paper but need to be considered along with options on potential policy topics for consideration that could be included in the Local Plan.

- 10.4** Updates on the progress of the Local Plan will be published on the Council's [webpages](#). Alternatively, registering on our [Consultation Portal](#) will ensure that you are informed of future Local Plan related consultations. Once registered you will be notified by email at each stage of engagement and be able to use the system to make comments on the documents published.



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### 11 Glossary

#### Accessibility

The ability of people to move around an area and reach places and facilities, including older and disabled people, those with young children and those carrying luggage or shopping.

#### Affordable housing

Affordable housing: housing for sale or rent, for those whose needs are not met by the market (including housing that provides a subsidised route to home ownership and/or is for essential local workers); and which complies with one or more of the following definitions:

a) Affordable housing for rent: meets all of the following conditions: (a) the rent is set in accordance with the Government's rent policy for Social Rent or Affordable Rent, or is at least 20% below local market rents (including service charges where applicable); (b) the landlord is a registered provider, except where it is included as part of a Build to Rent scheme (in which case the landlord need not be a registered provider); and (c) it includes provisions to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision. For Build to Rent schemes affordable housing for rent is expected to be the normal form of affordable housing provision (and, in this context, is known as Affordable Private Rent).

b) Starter homes: is as specified in Sections 2 and 3 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and any secondary legislation made under these sections. The definition of a starter home should reflect the meaning set out in statute and any such secondary legislation at the time of plan-preparation or decision-making. Where secondary legislation has the effect of limiting a household's eligibility to purchase a starter home to those with a particular maximum level of household income, those restrictions should be used.

c) Discounted market sales housing: is that sold at a discount of at least 20% below local market value. Eligibility is determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices. Provisions should be in place to ensure housing remains at a discount for future eligible households.

d) Other affordable routes to home ownership: is housing provided for sale that provides a route to ownership for those who could not achieve home ownership through the market. It includes shared ownership, relevant equity loans, other low cost homes for sale (at a price equivalent to at least 20% below local market value) and rent to buy (which includes a period of intermediate rent). Where public grant funding is provided, there should be provisions for the homes to remain

at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for any receipts to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision, or refunded to Government or the relevant authority specified in the funding agreement.

#### Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs)

Areas designated by local authorities because they are not likely to achieve national air quality objectives by the relevant deadlines.

#### Amenity

A positive element or elements that contribute to the overall character or enjoyment of an area. For example, open land, trees, historic buildings and the inter-relationship between them, or less tangible factors such as tranquillity.

#### Ancient or veteran tree

Tree which, because of its age, size and condition, is of exceptional biodiversity, cultural or heritage value. All ancient trees are veteran trees. Not all veteran trees are old enough to be ancient, but are old relative to other trees of the same species. Very few trees of any species reach the ancient life-stage.

#### Ancient woodland

An area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD. It includes ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS).

#### Archaeological interest

There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.

#### Architecture

The style in which a building is designed and constructed particularly with reference to specific time period or place.

#### Best and most versatile agricultural land

Land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Biodiversity

All aspects of biological diversity.

### Brownfield

See Previously Developed Land (PDL).

### Carbon offsetting

Carbon offsetting is a reduction or removal of emissions of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases made in order to compensate for emissions made elsewhere.

### Carbon sequestration

This is process of storing carbon. Land based carbon sequestration occurs across the natural environment storing a significant amount of carbon into 'carbon sinks', such as forests, grasslands, soils, oceans and other bodies of water.

### Circular economy

A circular economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible.

### Climate change adaptation

Adjustments made to natural or human systems in response to the actual or anticipated impacts of climate change, to mitigate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

### Climate change mitigation

Action to reduce the impact of human activity on the climate system, primarily through reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

### Community infrastructure

Facilities available for use by the community that provide for the health, welfare, social, educational, leisure, recreational and cultural needs of the community. Examples include village halls, doctors' surgeries, pubs, churches, museums, libraries and children's play areas. It may also include areas of informal open space and sports facilities.

### Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

A levy allowing local authorities to raise funds from owners or developers of land undertaking new building projects in their area.

### Conservation (for heritage)

The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.

### Conservation Area

An area "of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"

### Decentralised energy

Local renewable and local low carbon energy sources.

### Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, formerly the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, is the UK Government department for housing, communities, local government in England and the levelling up policy.

### Density

The amount of development on a given piece of land.

### Design code

A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area.

### Design Guide

A document providing guidance on how development can be carried out in accordance with good design practice, often produced by a local authority.

### Development Plan

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

Is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and includes adopted local plans, neighbourhood plans that have been made and published spatial development strategies, together with any regional strategy policies that remain in force. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.

### **Economic development**

Development, including those within the B Use Classes, public and community uses and main town centre uses (but excluding housing development).

### **Embodied Carbon**

Embodied carbon is the total greenhouse gas emissions (or carbon emissions) generated to construct a building or any other structure. The embodied carbon emissions can arise from the extraction, manufacture, processing, transportation and assembly of elements.

### **Environmental Impact Assessment**

A procedure to be followed for certain types of project to ensure that decisions are made in full knowledge of any likely significant effects on the environment.

### **European site**

This includes candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, and is defined in regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

### **Examination**

Independent inquiry into the soundness of a draft development plan document, chaired by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State.

### **Geodiversity**

The range of rocks, minerals, fossils, soils and landforms.

### **Green corridor**

Uninterrupted network of natural features within an urban area that acts as a linkage for wildlife, and potentially for people.

### **Green infrastructure**

The network of green spaces such as parks, playing fields, allotments and cemeteries; these may have public access or be private spaces. Traditionally including water features such as rivers and lakes these are increasingly referred to as blue infrastructure.

### **Green space**

Publicly accessible spaces, including local parks, sports grounds, cemeteries, school grounds, allotments, commons and historic parks and gardens.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTNA)**

This assesses the need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches in any local authority area.

### **Habitat site**

Any site which would be included within the definition at regulation 8 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 for the purpose of those regulations, including candidate Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Community Importance, Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and any relevant Marine Sites.

### **Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)**

A study intended to assess overall potential for housing and employment development in an area, including the identification of specific housing and employment sites with development potential over a 15 year time span. See also SHLAA.

### **Heritage assets**

A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. It includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).

### **Historic environment**

All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.

### **Infrastructure**

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

A collective term for services such as roads, electricity, sewerage, water, education and health facilities.

### **International, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity**

All international sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Ramsar sites), national sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and locally designated sites including Local Wildlife Sites.

### **Land use**

The broad functions land is used for such as industrial, residential or commercial.

### **Landmarks**

Significant buildings or physical features usually including churches, memorials, squares and individual buildings of particular architectural or historic importance.

### **Landscape**

The character and appearance of land including its shape, form, natural features, biodiversity and colours and the way these components are combined.

### **Landscape Character Assessment**

An assessment to identify different landscape areas which have a distinct character based on a recognisable pattern of elements, including combinations of geology, landform, soils, vegetation, land use and human settlement.

### **Local housing need**

The number of homes identified as being needed through the application of the standard method set out in national planning guidance (or, in the context of preparing strategic policies only, this may be calculated using a justified alternative approach as provided for in paragraph 61 of this Framework).

### **Local Nature Partnership**

A body, designated by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, established for the purpose of protecting and improving the natural environment in an area and the benefits derived from it.

### **Local planning authority**

The public authority whose duty it is to carry out specific planning functions for a particular area. All references to local planning authority include the district council, London borough council, county council, Broads Authority, National Park Authority, the Mayor of London and a development corporation, to the extent appropriate to their responsibilities.

### **Local plan**

A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.

### **Mitigation measures**

These are measures requested/ carried out in order to limit the damage by a particular development/ activity.

### **Neighbourhood plans**

A plan prepared by a parish council or neighbourhood forum for a designated neighbourhood area. In law this is described as a neighbourhood development plan in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

### **Nodes**

Distinct points within the structure of a settlement usually forming a junction or crossing point for paths, roads and/ or rivers or places of particular physical importance.

### **Obtrusive light**

Light pollution that includes the brightening of the night sky (sky glow), uncomfortably bright light (glare) and light spilled beyond the area being lit (light intrusion).

### **Older people**

People over or approaching retirement age, including the active, newly-retired through to the very frail elderly; and whose housing needs can encompass accessible, adaptable general needs housing through to the full range of retirement and specialised housing for those with support or care needs.

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

### Open space

All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.

### Operational carbon

Operational carbon arises from the carbon emitted through the use of the building over its entire life, including its end of life demolition and disposal.

### People with disabilities

People have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and that impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. These persons include, but are not limited to, people with ambulatory difficulties, blindness, learning difficulties, autism and mental health needs.

### Pollution

Anything that affects the quality of land, air, water or soils, which might lead to an adverse impact on human health, the natural environment or general amenity. Pollution can arise from a range of emissions, including smoke, fumes, gases, dust, steam, odour, noise and light.

### Previously developed land (PDL)

Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill, where provision for restoration has been made through development management procedures; land in built-up areas such as residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

### Primary routes

The main roads and railway lines running through and around the town or village.

### Public rights of way

The network of footpaths on which access on foot is legally protected and bridleways to which access on foot, cycle and horseback is legally protected.

### Priority habitats

Species and Habitats of Principal Importance included in the England Biodiversity List published by the Secretary of State under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

### Ramsar sites

Wetlands of international importance, designated under the 1971 Ramsar Convention.

### Registered Park and Garden

A site included on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in England.

### Registered Social Landlords

These are independent housing organisations registered with the Housing Corporation under the Housing Act 1996. Most are housing associations, but there are also trusts, co-operatives and companies.

### Renewable and low carbon energy

Includes energy for heating and cooling as well as generating electricity. Renewable energy covers those energy flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment – from the wind, the fall of water, the movement of the oceans, from the sun and also from biomass and deep geothermal heat. Low carbon technologies are those that can help reduce emissions (compared to conventional use of fossil fuels).

### Rural exception sites

Small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. Rural exception sites seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection. A proportion of market homes may be allowed on the site at the local planning authority's discretion, for example where essential to enable the delivery of affordable units without grant funding.

### Scheduled Monument



## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

A scheduled monument means any monument which is for the time being included in the schedule [compiled and maintained by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport].

### Secondary routes

The network of minor roads, streets and lanes running through and around the town or village.

### Setting of a heritage asset

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

### Spatial planning

Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning. It brings together and integrates policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function. This will include policies which can impact on land use, for example, by influencing the demands on or needs for development, but which are not capable of being delivered solely or mainly through the granting of planning permission and may be delivered through other means.

### Special Areas of Conservation

Areas defined by regulation 3 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been given special protection as important conservation sites.

### Special Protection Areas

Areas classified under regulation 15 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 which have been identified as being of international importance for the breeding, feeding, wintering or the migration of rare and vulnerable species of birds.

### Site of Special Scientific Interest

Sites designated by Natural England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment

### Strategic Green Space

These are areas of green space that serve a wider population than just the district, for example Paxton Pits and the Great Fen.

### Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)

A study intended to assess overall potential for housing development in an area, including the identification of specific housing sites with development potential over a 15 year time span. See also HELAA.

### Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)

A study intended to review the existing housing market in an area, consider the nature of future need for market and affordable housing and to inform policy development.

### Submission

Point at which a draft Development Plan is sent to the Secretary of State for examination.

### Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.

### Sustainable development

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is at the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework.

### Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

## Local Plan Issues Engagement Paper April 2023

These cover a range of approaches to surface water drainage management including source control measures such as rainwater recycling, infiltration devices to allow water to soak into the ground, vegetated features that hold and drain water downhill mimicking natural drainage patterns, filter drains and porous pavements to allow rainwater and run-off to infiltrate into permeable material below ground and provide storage if needed and basins and ponds to hold excess water after rain and allow controlled discharge that avoids flooding.

### **Sustainable transport modes**

Any efficient, safe and accessible means of transport with overall low impact on the environment, including walking and cycling, low and ultra low emission vehicles, car sharing and public transport.

### **Town Centre**

Area defined on the local authority's policies map, including the primary shopping area and areas predominantly occupied by main town centre uses within or adjacent to the primary shopping area. References to town centres or centres apply to city centres, town centres, district centres and local centres but exclude small parades of shops of purely neighbourhood significance. Unless they are identified as centres in the development plan, existing out-of-centre developments, comprising or including main town centre uses, do not constitute town centres.

### **Transport assessment**

A comprehensive and systematic process that sets out transport issues relating to a proposed development. It identifies measures required to improve accessibility and safety for all modes of travel, particularly for alternatives to the car such as walking, cycling and public transport, and measures that will be needed deal with the anticipated transport impacts of the development.

### **Transport statement**

A simplified version of a transport assessment where it is agreed the transport issues arising from development proposals are limited and a full transport assessment is not required.

### **Tree Preservation Order (TPO)**

An order made and confirmed by a local planning authority to protect trees from lopping, topping or felling without prior written consent.

### **Use Classes Order**

Planning regulations outlining a schedule of uses to which a given premises or building can be put. Some changes of use require planning permission.

### **Vernacular**

The typical way in which buildings or structures are made in a particular place, making use of local styles, techniques and materials.

### **Vitality and viability**

In terms of retailing, vitality is the capacity of a centre to grow or to develop its level of commercial activity. Viability is the capacity of a centre to achieve the commercial success necessary to sustain the existence of the centre.

### **Whole-life carbon**

Whole Life-Cycle Carbon (WLC) emissions are the carbon emissions resulting from the materials, construction and the use of a building over its entire life, including its demolition and disposal. A WLC assessment provides a true picture of a building's carbon impact on the environment.

### **Wildlife corridor**

Areas of habitat connecting wildlife populations.

### **Zero carbon building**

A building with net carbon emissions of zero over a typical year.