

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

14<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Portfolio Holder for Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs -  
Councillor Rebecca Breese,

Report Title	West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan: Spatial Options Consultation and Statement of Community Involvement and West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme
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## Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

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## List of Appendices

Appendix A – West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan: Spatial Options Consultation Paper

Appendix B – West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme

Appendix C – West Northamptonshire Statement of Community Involvement

## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. To seek approval for:

- a) the publication of the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan: Spatial Options Consultation Paper for the purposes of public consultation;
- b) a new Local Development Scheme which sets out the timetable for plan preparation;
- c) and a new Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which sets out how the strategic plan will be consulted upon.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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- 2.1 The three predecessor councils agreed to prepare a new local plan, known as the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (WNSP), to review and replace the strategic policies in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS) (Local Plan Part 1), which was adopted in December 2014. A consultation on the scope of the WNSP and the issues it should address was undertaken between August and October 2019. A consultation on potential spatial options is the next stage in the preparation of the WNSP. A spatial options consultation paper (Appendix A) has been prepared which sets out a spatial vision for West Northamptonshire and a number of strategic objectives to support the delivery of this vision. A number of potential spatial options are then presented which could meet the housing and economic development needs of West Northamptonshire over a plan period up to 2050.
- 2.2 Local Planning Authorities are required to produce, and keep up to date, a local development scheme (LDS) which sets out and timetables the local plans they will prepare to plan for development in their area. Approval is required for a new local development scheme for West Northamptonshire which sets out the timetable for the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan and the remaining stages leading to the adoption of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2) (Appendix B).
- 2.3 Each of the three predecessor councils have produced statements of community involvement, but these were focused on their part 2 plans and other planning matters. A need was identified to produce a SCI which specifically dealt with engagement on the forthcoming strategic plan. Consultation has been undertaken on the SCI (by the former three authorities working together). This report sets out the responses received, suggests changes to the SCI as a result of those comments and requests adoption of the amended SCI. If adopted, it would sit alongside the existing SCIs produced by the predecessor councils. As resources permit these will also be reviewed, to provide a single SCI for all planning matters across the area.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a) Approves the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan: Spatial Options Consultation Paper (Appendix A) for the purposes of public consultation as set out in this report.
  - b) Approves the West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme (Appendix B) which is to have effect upon expiry of the call-in period for Cabinet decisions.
  - c) Notes the responses to the consultation on the draft Statement of Community Involvement and adopts the Statement of Community Involvement with the amendments set out in Appendix C.
  - d) Delegates to the Assistant Director: Growth, Climate and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Built Environment and Rural Affairs, authority to make minor editorial and presentational changes to the above documents in their final published form.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- 4.1 The development plan (or local plan) is central to the planning system with a requirement in law that planning decisions must be taken in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Each local planning authority must identify their strategic priorities and have policies to address these in their local plans. It is essential that plans are in place and up to date. The preparation of the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan is required to ensure that the new council has an up to date development plan, and the spatial options consultation is the key next step in the preparation of the plan.
- 4.2 An LDS is required which sets out the Local Plans, which when prepared, will comprise part of the development plan for the area. The LDS must be made available publicly and kept up to date. For West Northamptonshire a new LDS is needed to set out the revised timetable for the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan and also for the remaining stages of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2).
- 4.3 Local authorities are also required to have in place an up to date SCI. Consultation has been undertaken on the SCI. This report sets out the responses received during the consultation and proposes changes in response to the representations. If adopted it would set out how the Strategic Plan will be consulted upon, at the various stages of preparation.

## **5. Report Background**

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### **West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan: Spatial Options Consultation Paper**

- 5.1 The three predecessor councils agreed to the prepare a new local plan, known as the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (WNSP), to review and replace the strategic policies in the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (Local Plan Part 1), which was adopted in December 2014. A joint local development scheme, setting out the timetable for the WNSP was agreed and published in October 2018.
- 5.2 An issues consultation on the scope of the WNSP and the issues it should address was undertaken between August and October 2019. The responses received to the Issues Consultation were reported to the West Northamptonshire Joint Planning and Infrastructure Board in January 2020.
- 5.3 Since the beginning of 2020 technical work has continued to support the preparation of the plan and to support the next stage of consultation on potential spatial options. This work has included a housing and economic needs assessment which assesses future development needs for housing (both market and affordable) and employment over the period 2020-2050. Work has also progressed on the preparation of a strategic land availability assessment (SLAA). The SLAA provides an assessment of land availability to help identify a future supply of land which is suitable, available and achievable for housing and economic development over the plan period covered by the WNSP. The SLAA is a key element of the evidence base for the plan.
- 5.4 Using the technical work that has been completed, the Strategic Plan Project Team has produced a Spatial Options Consultation Paper which is attached as Appendix A to this report. The consultation paper sets out a proposed spatial vision for West Northamptonshire which outlines

the ambition for West Northamptonshire's economy, people and environment in 2050. Place based visions are also included for Northampton, Daventry, Brackley, Towcester and the rural areas. The vision has been informed by responses received to the Issues consultation and has been further developed through engagement with members and senior officers. It also seeks to reflect key elements of the recently approved corporate plan.

- 5.5 The spatial vision is supported by 16 strategic objectives which are grouped under five of the priorities set out in the corporate plan. Whilst the basis for these objectives lies in the existing Joint Core Strategy they have been reviewed and updated to reflect the responses received to the Issues consultation and changing circumstances. The consultation paper is seeking the views of stakeholders and the community as to whether the vision and objectives are appropriate for West Northamptonshire.
- 5.6 The consultation paper then provides details of the scale of housing and employment growth that may be required over the plan period to 2050 as identified in the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment. From the technical work undertaken to date a range of potential spatial options to meet the housing and economic needs of the area is presented. These options include potential growth at Northampton, Daventry, Brackley, and Towcester, together with options to the north-west of Milton Keynes and to the south of Long Buckby. Commentary is also included on the scale of growth that may be acceptable in the rural areas of West Northamptonshire. Potential options for strategic employment growth are presented, principally focussed on the M1 corridor.
- 5.7 All of the options in the consultation paper are being presented as potential options rather than preferred options at this stage. In all cases further technical work is required before the preferred spatial options are agreed. One such piece of work is a study of the potential for new settlements in West Northamptonshire which has not yet been completed. The findings of this study and any potential new settlement options arising from it will be subject to consultation at the next stage of plan preparation.
- 5.8 The purpose of the consultation is to seek the views of our community and stakeholders and ensure that they play a key role in determining the preferred spatial strategy. Respondents to the consultation will be able to suggest alternative options and a further opportunity will be provided to submit new site proposals through a reopened 'call for sites'.
- 5.9 Subject to Cabinet approval, the spatial options consultation paper will be published for an eight-week consultation period starting in October. The final details of the consultation strategy are being agreed with the corporate consultation and communication teams.

### **West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme**

- 5.10 As indicated above local authorities are required to publish a local development scheme (LDS) setting out details of the Local Plans they intend to prepare and ensure that this is kept up to date. The joint LDS prepared in 2018 is now out of date and needs to be updated to reflect the current timetable for the strategic plan. It also needs to include the completion of the remaining stages of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2) given that the LDS now applies to the new council.

Local authorities are required to specify the date that LDSs will be effective from, it is suggested that this is upon expiry of the call-in period for cabinet decisions.

- 5.11 An LDS (attached as Appendix B) has been prepared setting out the anticipated timetable for the preparation of the WNSP and the examination and adoption stages of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2). The LDS anticipates that the WNSP would be submitted for examination in April 2023 with adoption in March 2024. The timing of the examination hearings for the Northampton Part 2 Plan has not yet been settled, however given the progress made in preparing for the examination it is possible that they could take place between October and December this year and subject to the examination Inspectors' findings the plan could be adopted by April or May 2022.

### **West Northamptonshire Statement of Community Involvement**

- 5.12 All local authorities are required to have in place an up to date SCI. Each of the predecessor councils produced SCIs (of various dates), which remain in place. However, they deal largely with the part 2 plans and other planning matters. They do not provide a single co-ordinated approach to inform plan making across West Northamptonshire and are not therefore fit for purpose for the forthcoming strategic plan.
- 5.13 A draft SCI was produced and agreed for consultation by the three predecessor councils. Consultation took place towards the end of 2020. A copy of the consultation draft version [can be seen here](#).
- 5.14 Appendix C sets out the responses received and suggests changes to the SCI as a result. Responses were received from a variety of sources including organisations, parish councils, statutory consultees and residents. The majority were largely supportive of the approach, whilst some suggested changes. The changes are relatively minor but add useful clarity to various parts of the document.
- 5.15 Some further editorial changes will also be required to reflect the fact that the document will be in its final form, as opposed to a consultation draft, and it will be a document of the West Northamptonshire Council rather than the three predecessor councils.
- 5.16 The existing SCI's produced by the former sovereign councils will remain in place, however as resources permit, they will be updated and replaced with a single SCI for all planning matters in West Northamptonshire.

### **Editorial and Presentational Changes**

- 5.17 The spatial options document and LDS set out in the appendices are presented in a draft word document format. There will be a need to make further editorial and presentational changes to the final published versions of the documents and delegated authority is sought for these. For example, the communications team is working on the final publication version of the spatial options consultation paper to make it more attractive and accessible to the community. Some further editorial changes will also be required to the SCI to reflect the fact that the document will

be in its final form, as opposed to a consultation draft, and it will be a document of the West Northamptonshire Council rather than the predecessor councils.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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### **West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan: Spatial Options Consultation Paper**

- 6.1 The preparation of the WNSP is an important priority for West Northamptonshire Council and it is essential that the council has an up to date development plan that identifies the strategic priorities for the area and provides a policy framework to ensure the delivery of those priorities. The recently adopted part 2 local plans covering the Daventry and South Northamptonshire areas and the emerging part 2 local plan for Northampton, will provide the Council with a set of up to date development management policies. However, the existing part 1 local plan (i.e. the JCS) was adopted at the end of 2014 and needs to be reviewed and updated for a number of reasons, including changes in national policy and to respond to new challenges and opportunities such as those associated with the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and the emerging Spatial Framework.
- 6.2 The spatial options consultation is a key stage in the process of preparing the WNSP and an important step in ensuring that the council has an up to date part 1 plan at the earliest opportunity. Cabinet could choose not to agree the spatial options consultation at this stage, but this would risk delays in the timetable.
- 6.3 The proposed consultation will provide an important opportunity for our community, statutory bodies, and other stakeholders to inform the development of the preferred spatial strategy and strategic development options at a relatively early stage in the process. At this stage all of the options are presented as having potential, rather than being preferred and as such it will be a genuinely open consultation.
- 6.4 When the plan reaches the examination stage, the council will be expected to show that it has considered all reasonable alternatives in the development of its spatial strategy. The Spatial Options consultation will help the council to demonstrate that it has done just that.

### **West Northamptonshire Local Development Scheme**

- 6.5 The LDS presented at Appendix B sets out a reasonable timetable for the preparation of the WNSP and the completion of the remaining stages of the Northampton Local Plan (Part 2) based on the resources currently available. It is a statutory requirement for the council to publish an LDS and ensure that it is up to date, and as such failing to approve an LDS is not an option.
- 6.6 Cabinet could consider options for preparing the WNSP more quickly, but this would necessitate additional resources, and may also run the risk that the plan would not be thoroughly prepared and could be found to be unsound at examination.

## **West Northamptonshire Statement of Community Involvement**

- 6.7 The cabinet could choose to accept the suggested changes as a result of consultation, in their current or an amended form.
- 6.8 The cabinet could choose to adopt or not the SCI. If it chose not to it would not have an SCI in place that deal with engagement on the strategic plan, this could prove to be an issue when the plan comes forward for examination in due course, as the examiners will want to be assured that proper processes are in place and have been followed in order to find the plan sound.

### **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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#### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 The spatial options consultation, the implementation of the SCI and the examination and adoption of the Northampton Part 2 Local Plan can all be met from existing resources. Further consideration of the budget required to deliver the strategic plan may be required in future years.

#### **7.2 Legal**

- 7.2.1 The strategic plan will form part of the statutory development plan for West Northamptonshire and as such it is being prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 7.2.2 It is a statutory requirement (Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) to publish a local development scheme and ensure that it is kept up to date.
- 7.2.3 It is a statutory requirement that the council prepares a statement of community involvement and engages stakeholders when preparing new planning policy.

#### **7.3 Risk**

- 7.3.1 Failure to prepare an up to date development plan for the area would mean that the council runs the risk of not being able to effectively manage development in its area, and to secure benefits associated with such development such as contributions to infrastructure. There would be an increased risk of speculative applications and planning by appeal.
- 7.3.2 Failure to maintain an up to date LDS would be criticised by the independent examiner of the strategic plan and could lead to the plan failing the legal tests.
- 7.3.3 Not having an SCI in place would introduce a risk that the independent examiner of the strategic plan is not satisfied that appropriate processes for engagement were in place.

## **7.4 Consultation**

7.4.1 A comprehensive consultation strategy is being prepared in cooperation with the council's consultation and communications teams to ensure that the spatial options consultation meets the requirements of the SCI and is as effective as possible.

7.4.2 The main body of the report deals with consultation on the draft SCI.

## **7.5 Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 Not applicable.

## **7.6 Climate Impact**

7.6.1 One of the objectives included in the spatial options consultation relates to climate change. The WNSP will include policies in respect of climate change and is expected to make a key contribution to the council's ambitions in this respect.

## **7.7 Community Impact**

7.7.1 At this stage the proposals in the spatial options are in draft form and as such do not have a direct impact on communities. The next consultation stage will set out preferred options and draft policies which will be subject to a full equalities impact assessment.

7.7.2 The LDS provides information to the community on the timetable for the preparation of Local Plans and the opportunities for the community to be involved.

7.7.3 The SCI sets out how communities will be engaged with in preparing the Strategic Plan.

## **7.8 Communications**

7.8.1 See 7.4.1 above

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 West Northamptonshire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment

8.2 West Northamptonshire Strategic Land Availability Assessments

8.3 Responses to the West Northamptonshire Strategic Plan Issues Consultation, 'Call for Sites, and SA Scoping Report.