

# Planning Committee

06 November 2020

Agenda item number 10

## NSPF update

Report by Planning Policy Officer

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### Summary

This report updates members on progress of Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework 2020/21 work programme. It also sets out proposals for county wide joint working under the Norfolk Strategic Planning Member forum beyond the completion of the third version of the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework.

### Recommendation

To note the report and continue to endorse the joint working by Norfolk Local Planning Authorities. It is also recommended that Members endorse the principle of continued, formal cooperation through the Norfolk Strategic Planning Member Forum supported by a shared administration function to further the joint working in the areas highlighted in this report.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework (NSPF) is a document that has been produced by all the Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Norfolk, together with the involvement of relevant bodies such as the Environment Agency. The NSPF sets out guidelines for strategic planning matters across the county, and beyond, and demonstrates how the LPAs will work together under the Duty to Co-operate through a series of agreements on planning related topics. The Framework has been put together

by officers from the Norfolk LPAs, under the oversight of a member level group comprising representatives from all the authorities.

- 1.2. Although the Framework is not a statutory planning document, as it has not been through the full process required to achieve such status, it sets out the strategic matters to be taken account of in the production of Local Plans by the constituent Norfolk LPAs.
- 1.3. The purpose of the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework (NSPF version 3) Programme is to update and maintain the previously endorsed NSPF (version 2). The programme will aim to provide a refreshed NSPF in early 2021. The programme will also deliver a number of new joint studies to inform Local Plans, providing cost saving over local authorities commissioning these separately. The following work streams are being completed by the programme, to inform version 3:
  - The completion of a county wide Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS);
  - The completion of an Older Persons Housing and Support Needs Study for Norfolk;
  - The completion of a comprehensive review of Climate Change and its impact across the area to inform Local Plans looking at mitigation, adaptation and sequestering of greenhouse gases;
  - The NSPF Economic section will be reviewed to align with the Local Industrial Strategy and other local and national work;
  - Maintain links to NHS estates and the CCGs with regular meetings to share updates on key developments and progress of Local Plans; and
  - Complete the production of 5G Shared guidance and the Broadband guides.

## 2. Implications of the Planning White Paper

- 2.1. The Government published its 'Planning for the Future' White Paper on 6 August. Amongst the many changes to the planning system proposed in the paper is the abolition of the Duty to Cooperate. A number of authorities are looking to expedite their Local Plan process and submit their Local Plans before any new regulations come into force. As a result, work on updating of the NSPF continues so that there is an up to date version of the NSPF ready for these Local Plans. The Government also published proposals for a new standard methodology for assessing local housing need; this could significantly increase the calculated overall county wide housing need by as much as 40%. If this was to happen it would strengthen the need for closer working on strategic planning matters going forward.
- 2.2. Due to the White Paper and the timescales needed to have a new version of the NSPF completed, the changes to the document are being scaled back and officers are proposing that there is not a public consultation on this new version of the document.

- 2.3. NSPF is being updated with appreciation of the proposed changes in the White Paper and other changes announced at the same time like the new standard methodology for calculating local housing need. However, there remains much uncertainty around the detail of the changes.

### 3. Progress of the next version of the NSPF

- 3.1. Much of the work for the third version of the NSPF is nearing completion. This will enhance areas deemed to need improvement and deliver a number of new joint studies to inform Local Plans. Details of progress with the various workstreams is given below.
- 3.2. **Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy** – Place Services were commissioned in 2019 to produce a county wide Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS). The final report for this study is nearing completion; the work has been delayed because we have been unable to get the necessary input from Natural England who have been heavily engaged in Sizewell C proposals. We expect this work to be completed in the next 2 months and the recommendations will be reported to members at the next member forum. The work will include the following:
- a. A review of the opportunity areas for the provision of new and/or enhanced Green Infrastructure in the county;
  - b. An understanding of the current management measures for visitors to the European sites and evidence for recreational disturbance; and
  - c. The mitigation necessary to avoid significant adverse effects from residential development and a detailed programme of strategic mitigation measures which is recommended for funding by developer contributions from residential development schemes.
- 3.3. **Older Persons Accommodation and Support Needs Study** – Three Dragons have been commissioned to complete an Older Persons Accommodation and Support Needs Study. Work on this project is nearing completion and we are working with the consultants to finalise the report. We expect this work to be completed in the next 2 months and outputs will be reported to members at the next member forum. The study will:
- a. Provide a robust evidence-based demand assessment of older people's accommodation until 2041 to inform Local Plans;
  - b. Provide context on viability and how LPAs can support development; and
  - c. Develop site identification criteria which can be used consistently across Norfolk.
- 3.4. **Climate Change** – The Climate Change group was set up late summer in 2019. The group has reviewed information in relation to Climate Change with a specific focus on the role and impact on Local Plans and the planning system generally. It has also explored some of the emerging policy work around climate change, and background information. The group is finalising recommendations and has produced a detailed paper on the various topics that local government can influence covering both mitigation and adaptation to climate change. We expect this work to be completed in

the next 2 months and recommendations will be reported to members at the next member forum.

- 3.5. **Health** – Local Authorities continue to work with health colleagues to understand how we can ensure a better health provision for the communities of Norfolk. Regular meetings are continuing to take place covering West Norfolk, Central Norfolk, and Great Yarmouth and Waveney to:
- Review Local Plan progress;
  - Provide updates on current and forthcoming key development schemes;
  - Provide updates on key healthcare developments and new facilities;
  - Review production of health Infrastructure Delivery Plans; and
  - Review key planning/health changes.
- 3.6. The STP are working on producing Health Infrastructure Delivery plans for each of the local planning areas in the county; LPAs will continue to work with the STP to support their production. The meetings are also being used to understand a number of changes with the health system with the merger of the 5 CCGs in Norfolk and the move to an Integrated Care System, and the impacts of the Coronavirus and how this may impact health care provision in the future.
- 3.7. **5G Shared guidance and the Broadband guides** – New guidance and joint policies to support the roll out of 5G and broadband to the county have been produce and the work of the group completed. The recommendations will be reported to members at the next member forum.
- 3.8. **Overall Programme Timetable** – The high level programme of work for the NSPF has been delayed slightly for various reasons, including the coronavirus pandemic as some officers have been reallocated to other work to support this. However, the programme remains on target to produce a draft version of the document for Local Plans looking to be submitted early in the New Year. A new additional member forum will be scheduled in November/December to focus on the updated NSPF and the outputs of all the workstreams due to complete soon. The aim will be to have a new endorsed NSPF in place by January/February 2021 by individual authority committees.

## 4. Next steps

- 4.1. There is significant value in continuing with a work programme into the next financial year to address strategic cross boundary issues going forward. Although there is uncertainty about what the requirements will entail as and when the planning system is changed, there are other significant benefits to continuing with the current strategic planning activities completed under this remit. These include:
- Maintaining links to other neighbouring counties and their strategic planning work;
  - Maintain links to public bodies and utilities involved in the preparation of Local Plans eg Natural England, Environment Agency, Anglian Water, MMO, UKPN;
  - Maintain links to other key initiatives in the county eg Water Resources East, Hydrogen East, Greater South East Energy Hub;

- Support the county in the production of a county wide Infrastructure Delivery Plan and any potential economic or growth strategies;
  - Support of Local Plan processes across the county;
  - Maintain links to NHS estates and the CCG with regular meetings to share updates on key developments and progress of Local Plans; and
  - Scope to continue to commission joint studies across the county to reduce costs.
- 4.2. It is therefore recommended that the Norfolk Local Planning Authorities continue to work together, even if there is not a requirement relating to Duty to Cooperate. The following work streams could be completed:
- 4.3. Norfolk Design Guide/Charter - The White Paper strengthens the need for local design initiatives and the work of the NSPF completed this year has highlighted that design guidance could help with both climate change and healthy living initiatives. As such, there is a strong case for looking at a Norfolk Design Guide or Charter. Suffolk are in the process of completing a similar exercise (see <https://www.suffolksdesign.uk/> for more details). The initial steps would be to investigate how this is best achieved and to what level all authorities are willing to work to a single design guide. It is clear for this to succeed that external and community involvement would be required and we would also need to understand in more detail any proposed changes to the NPPF and legislation. It is likely that external support will be required for this work which will need to be commissioned.
- 4.4. **Implementation of RAMS tariff** - Subject to the approval of all Norfolk authorities to the Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, there will be a requirement to implement and start collection of the new RAMS Tariff. Exact details about how this will be collected and managed are yet to be formulated, but member approval will be sought prior to implementation.
- 4.5. **Review of the county wide HELAA Methodology** - The county wide Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment Methodology (HELAA) is now nearly 5 year old and based on the 2012 version of the NPPF. That fact it is out of date has been picked up by external parties and could potentially be used as part of an appeal or by climate change groups in the future; it is recommended that this is updated in line with any new NPPF.
- 4.6. **Commissioning of new evidence to support future Local Plans** - Whilst the information contained in the White Paper lacks much detail, it is likely that evidence in a number of areas will need to be created or updated. If this is completed jointly it is likely to result in significant cost savings. Further details of what might be required will come forward once the updated NPPF is published, but some evidence completed jointly is now quite old and there is a case for updating evidence like the visitor pressure study last completed in 2015.
- 4.7. **Possible assessment of a countywide approach to new settlements** - The new standard methodology being proposed by the Government will potentially increase the overall calculated county wide housing need by 40%. Finding this level of new additional development using existing towns and villages will be challenging. Members are asked to consider support for a county wide task and finish group to be setup to assess the need for a new settlement and suitable locations for the settlement.

- 4.8. **Possible requirements to update the NSPF** - Once further clarification is provided by central government through new legislation and a revised NPPF, it will become clearer if Norfolk LPAs can continue to address strategic planning matters through a revision to the NSPF. Requirements around the new standard methodology may result in the need for greater cooperation at a county level.

## 5. How will this work be delivered?

- 5.1. To complete the full programme of work highlighted in the previous sections, it is proposed that we maintain the existing shared programme resource with some planning officer support provided by each district. Resource requirements from each authority will continue to be kept to a minimum, but it is important that all authorities support the work to ensure they are comfortable with direction it is taking.
- 5.2. The shared resource will oversee and manage the following workstreams and associated steering groups:
- Norfolk Design Guide/Charter;
  - Implementation of RAMS tariff;
  - Review of the county wide HELAA Methodology;
  - Investigation into a new settlement in Norfolk;
  - Commissioning of new evidence to support future Local Plans; and
  - Update the NSPF if required by any future revision to the NPPF.
- 5.3. The shared resource will also continue to coordinate other joint planning activities as listed in the first section of this report including maintaining links to neighbouring counties, public bodies, utilities, NHS estates and the CCG.
- 5.4. The budget expected to be carried forward in to the 2021/22 financial year is already sufficient to cover the cost of the shared programme management resource (which it is proposed will continue to be hosted by Norwich City Council). However, it is proposed that each authority continues to contribute £10,000 (£5,000 from the Broads Authority) for the next financial year; this additional budget will cover any ad hoc administration and allow for external work to be commissioned to deliver a county wide Design Guide/Charter and to cover set up costs for the RAMS tariff. If additional external work is identified this would need to be funded separately.
- 5.5. The existing NSPF funding was provided by the seven Norfolk district authorities and the Broads Authority and it is proposed that this is continued. For the NSPF, the Broads' contribution was half that of other authorities and it is proposed that their contribution remains the same. Norfolk County Council currently funds the East of England Forecast Model (c £4,000) and will continue to provide officer support for the joint working.

## 6. Financial implications

- 6.1. The Broads Authority would contribute £5,000. This has been budgeted for and would be paid for through the Policy budget.

## 7. Conclusion

- 7.1. For a contribution from each local authority of just £10,000 and £5,000 for the Broads Authority, by the end of this financial year the Norfolk Strategic Planning Programme will have delivered significant benefits to its member authorities. These include:
- The completion of an updated NSPF which has been successfully used to demonstrate the duty to cooperate at a number of planning inspections and has been used regularly as an example of good practice across the country;
  - The completion of the Norfolk wide Green Infrastructure and Recreational Impact avoidance strategy to support habitat regulations within local plans;
  - The completion of a detailed strategy to support the needs of the elderly population in Norfolk – the fastest growing age group in this county;
  - Detailed analysis of the impacts that Local Plans can make to supporting the climate change initiatives across the county;
  - Improved working with neighbouring counties and other public bodies; and
  - Closer working relationships with health partners to support the planning process for health infrastructure.
- 7.2. This represents significant value over completing these tasks individually. It is therefore recommended that the programme continues for the next financial year with the work programme highlighted in this report.

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