



# Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel

To All Members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel on  
Wednesday, 05 June 2024

Date of meeting: Thursday, 13 June 2024

Time: 18:30

Venue: Harborough Innovation Centre  
Harborough Innovation Centre, Wellington Way, Airfield  
Business Park, Market Harborough, LE16 7WB

Members of the public can access a live broadcast of the meeting from the [Council website](#), and the meeting webpage. The meeting will also be open to the public.

## Agenda

- 1 Election of Chairman 2024-25
- 2 Election of Vice-Chairman 2024-25
- 3 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes.
- 4 Declarations of Members' Interests
- 5 DRAFT Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel Minutes - 3 - 8  
16.11.2023
- 6 Portfolio Holder Update

Consider the following reports:

- |   |   |         |
|---|---|---------|
| 7 | Economic Development Strategy 2024 – 31                   | 9 - 54  |
| 8 | Criteria for Community Grants to Parish and Town Councils | 55 - 60 |

- 9 **The Future of Public Open Space Management Across the 61 - 82 District**
- 10 **Scrutiny Workplan 2024-25**  
To Follow
- 11 **To consider any urgent items (to be decided by the Chairman)**

JOHN RICHARDSON  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND HEAD OF PAID SERVICE  
HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Contact:  
[democratic.services@harborough.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@harborough.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 01858 828282

Circulate to: Buddy Anderson - Member, Peter James - Member, Rani Mahal - Member, Amanda Nunn - Member, Martin Sarfas - Member, Lynne Taylor - Member, Simon Whelband - Member

**And all other Councillors for information**

# Minutes of the Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel



**Location:** Council Chamber, The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough, LE16 7AG

**Date:** 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023 commencing at 6.30pm

## **Present:**

**Councillors:** Finan, Galton (ex-officio), James (Chair), Nunn, Sarfas, Taylor, Whelband

**Officers:** D. Atkinson – Director of Planning  
T. Nelson - Head of Strategic Planning  
E. Newman – Democratic Services Officer

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Johnson (Councillor Finan substituted) and Bannister.

### **2. Declaration of Members' Interests**

There were none.

### **3. Draft Community Scrutiny Panel Minutes – 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

The minutes of the meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023 were accepted as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman after the following amendments were made:

Councillor Whelband was nominated as Vice Chair, not Councillor Nunn.

The Chair updated the panel that the Interim Chief Executive will be providing further direction on Portfolio Holder attendance at scrutiny panel meetings.

#### 4. Portfolio Holder Update

The Portfolio Holder for Planning provided an update on the progress of the Local Plan development, and on the work completed by the Local Plan Advisory Panel. He considered that first critical step in the development of the Local Plan will be to discuss the Regulation 18 process. In April 2024, Harborough's Local Plan will be 5 years old.

#### 5. Local Plan Timetable (Local Development Scheme/LDS) and Issues and Options consultation (Regulation 18)

The report was presented by the Portfolio Holder for Planning, alongside the Head of Strategic Planning. He discussed the importance of this report as the first step in the development in the new Local Plan.

The following questions and responses were as follows:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
How will the authority work to the short timescale to submit the Local Plan?	The authority has and is implementing further good governance and budget management, is using available toolkits, engaging external expertise, and finding additional resourcing/staffing.
What will happen if the council does not meet the deadline set out in the report?	Circumstances outside of the council's control may halt the progress. Various external bodies that will be involved, are being approached early to advise them of the upcoming Local Plan development. If the deadline is not met, the evidence collected and work already completed will not be wasted, it will be re-used to submit at a later point.
What will the costings to produce the Local Plan be?	The current Local Plan cost £1.8million, it is likely that due to rising costs outside of the council, the new plan costs will be increased. The reporting is being prepared and will be progressed to the next Cabinet meeting and subsequent Council meeting.
How will the council ensure the project is appropriately resourced? How much would the increased staffing cost?	Currently, there is a national shortage of planners, however, the planning team have started reaching out via professional networks and are receiving positive feedback from this initial contact. The additional cost will be outlined in an extra report to be reviewed by Cabinet.
How has the new Settlement Hierarchy been determined? And will it be voted on?	Cabinet will be required to vote on this at the next meeting on 27 <sup>th</sup> November 2023. The document being discussed regards

	Regulation 18 and issues and options, and the Settlement Hierarchy can be commented on during the public consultation.
How has it been determined that Harborough would likely be in a later group of Local Plans under the new central government legislation (LURA)?	Recent Counsel advice provided at previous council meeting (6 <sup>th</sup> November 2023) provides some information on this. There are no guarantees that Harborough District Council will be part of the pilot scheme in the new central government led process. As it is a new process there is still extra legislation to come from central government to guide local authorities. There is still much to be determined around how the new system will operate, for example, via secondary legislation.
What specific stakeholders are being engaged in the consultation?	Clarification was provided that every resident of the district is a stakeholder. As well as this various companies and public bodies (National Highways, Natural England, Leicestershire County Council, NHS) are being invited to comment on the consultation presented.
How is growth in warehousing being accounted for?	A piece of evidence is being developed for the Leicester and Leicestershire area, reporting on strategic distribution of warehousing to guide the Local Plan process.
What additional costings will there be if the deadline is not met?	The costings of the new Local Plan are dependent on absolute details of transitional arrangements. If the deadline is not met, the existing work and evidence completed will be bundled and taken into the following plan preparation under the new system. Additional costings are not included in the upcoming financial report, as an estimation cannot be made at this stage due to the changing evidence base.
Is this report developed with the assumption that the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground will be agreed?	The Issues and Options report and the Leicester & Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground report are not dependent on one another, the report being discussed at this panel is a separate decision to be made regarding the Regulation 18 Issues and Options document.
Would figures in the report need to be adjusted if the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground is not agreed?	Within the report there are three different scales of growth identified to provide a range of data as a way of future proofing the Local Plan for potential circumstance change (e.g. Annual Housing Needs)

	between the Regulation 18 consultation and the Planning Inspectorate review following submission of the plan for its examination.
What will the consultation process taking place in January and February 2024 look like?	There will be a six-week consultation process. The responses will be analysed and collated, then reviewed by the Cabinet & Council to inform the Regulation 19 draft plan that will again go to Cabinet & Council prior to publication for consultation. As part of the Regulation 18, Issues and Options consultation there will be a static notice board to view in the customer service area of The Symington Building. The consultation will be taking place largely online but will be supported by further telephone and email consultation and in person drop-in sessions. Drop-in sessions are mainly for members of the public to ask any questions that they may have answered. As well as this, parish councils and parish meetings in the district are being contacted to receive their thoughts. There will be an advertisement in the Harborough Mail, and it was also suggested that there be an advertisement in the Swift Flash. The authority is working to front load the publicity for the Regulation 18 Issues and Options consultation.
Where will the consultation drop-in sessions be held?	It is likely that the drop-in sessions will be held in Market Harborough, Lutterworth, and potentially Scraptoft, (certainly in that area of the district.)
When will the consultation drop-in sessions be held?	The sessions are normally held for ½ - ¾ of a day, and this will ensure that the sessions span both working and non-working hours.
Could a consultation drop-in session be allocated to a larger village in the district?	This suggestion was noted.
Will the outcomes of the consultation be publicised?	The data provided in the consultation will be organised, catalogued, analysed, and a response will be provided to it. This information will be considered by officers, and then presented to councillors.
How will the council ensure that larger stakeholders/significant service providers are engaged with on consultation?	This is a link to the Statement of Community Involvement - <a href="https://www.harborough.gov.uk/directory_record/563/statement_of_community_involvement">https://www.harborough.gov.uk/directory_record/563/statement_of_community_involvement</a> This is available on the Harborough District Council website. This lists the significant service providers that will be involved in the consultation. To ensure contribution to the

	consultation, communications are followed up, and an ongoing dialogue is opened.
Will there be an impact on other duties of the planning department's service delivery?	It is unlikely that the development of the Local Plan will have an impact on the provision of other council services.
How is the need for water infrastructure upgrade considered?	As part of the consultation, important consultees such as the water authorities, lead local flood authority, and the environment agency are approached for their expertise. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan will sit alongside the Local Plan to provide further information on the infrastructure required to deliver and implement the local plan.
Have there been any definite appointments to the planning department for the required increase in resourcing?	There haven't been any confirmed additional appointments to the Strategic Planning team yet.
Is the 6-week timeline for the consultation enough time?	There will be a pre-consultation notice, to advise people of the consultation and drop-in sessions. Parish Councils will receive notice, prior to the consultation, to make the necessary meeting arrangements to discuss the matter. The consultation development process has considered demographics of the district to accommodate as much of the public as possible.
What will be the timescale to receive a fully comprehensive risk assessment on delivery of the Regulation 18 process?	The Head of Strategic Planning will take this query away to review and respond.
What would the increased resource in the Strategic Planning team look like?	There is already a very capable existing team in place, which will be integral to the Local Plan process. What is looking to be done is to supplement the already existing team, with equally capable new members of the team, as well as members of outside bodies and consultants, for areas of specialist knowledge.

Key issues discussed were the costings of the Local Plan Regulation 18 process, the planning department resourcing to deliver the plan to the timeline provided, and the consultation that would take place with the public and key significant stakeholders.

The panel members commented on the proposed updated Local Development Scheme, and on the scope of the first public consultation on the new local plan.

It was discussed that the questions and comments provided by the panel would be reviewed and passed onto the Cabinet for discussion at their next meeting.

#### **6. Any Urgent Business**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting ended at 20:00



# Harborough District Council

## Report to Communities Overview and Scrutiny Meeting of 13 June 2024



<b>Title:</b>	Economic Development Strategy 2024 – 31
<b>Status:</b>	Public
<b>Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Report Author:</b>	Rebecca Tomlin - Economic Development Manager
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr Asher - Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism
<b>Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appendix A - Economic Development Strategy 2024 – 31</li> <li>• Appendix B – Evidence Review and Issues Paper</li> </ul>

### Summary

- i. The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 will replace the previous Strategy which expired at the end of 2023.
- ii. The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 is currently out for a six-week consultation with businesses and other key stakeholders consisting of workshops, displays, online, social media etc.
- iii. The new strategy which covers the period until 2031 aims to address the district's challenges and opportunities in the mid-late 2020s. The Strategy is based on an Evidence Review and Issues Paper produced in early 2024.

### Recommendations

1. To receive, consider and comment on the Economic Development Strategy 2024/31.
2. To note the four goals; Economic, People, Place and Environment which broadly mirror the four Council Priorities which will enable the delivery of the strategy.
3. To note the economic climate is volatile and unpredictable so much so unforeseen challenges may need to be considered during the period of this strategy.

### Reasons for Recommendations

- i. To provide members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel with the details on the Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 which will be considered by Cabinet in July 2024.

# 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To enable members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to have an opportunity to review the Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 and for officers to consider any amendments or recommendations before the Strategy is taken to Cabinet in July 2024.

# 2. Background

- 2.1 The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 aims to address the district’s challenges and opportunities in the mid-late 2020s. The Strategy is based on an Evidence Review and Issues Paper produced in early 2024.
- 2.2 The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 outlines how the Council will measure and review economic progress across the 2024/31 period. It emphasises a partnership approach, with Harborough District Council (HDC) playing key roles in community leadership, coordination, influence, and implementation.
- 2.3 The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 identifies the significant challenges and opportunities with strong economic dimensions that Harborough District faces and how the Council and its partners will address these. It will run alongside the remaining period of the Harborough Local Plan (2011/31) to better align spatial and economic strategies.

# 3. Details

- 3.1 A detailed Evidence Review and Issues Paper, found at Appendix B, was produced in early 2024. It thoroughly analyses the local economy and current trends, and the findings are summarised in the high-level strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats matrix below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Affluent, high-performing district with high quality of life and environment and considerable vitality in many important core economic metrics - skills, occupational employment, jobs and enterprise density, resident wages, and household income	Typical non-metropolitan demographic challenges, major housing market pressures and tensions, lack of major business clusters anchored by global players and a well-defined innovation eco-system, and no HE or even FE footprint
Well-located for Leicester, other East and West Midlands centres, with good connectivity to London and some regional airports	Not particularly well-placed to command policy attention and prioritisation from Government and LLEP compared to other L&L flagship places and developments
Seemingly not as vulnerable to pandemic, impacts and other potential shocks as many places – with very low levels of multiple deprivation and strong health and wellbeing	Economic strengths over-reliant on out-commuting and perhaps Magna Park. Local GVA, productivity and workplace wages are low and not growing particularly fast
Opportunities	Threats
Very well-positioned to take advantage of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life leveraging how well-connected it is to local cities and metropolitan centres	National/regional context pays little attention to Harborough District and low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity
Magna Park and its existing consents could offer an opportunity for step-change and transformation in economic profile and performance of the campus and district	Local complacency and resistance to change may inhibit ambition and necessary decisive, radical decision-making and delivery effectiveness
Market Harborough could create a new exemplary post-pandemic market town – together with reconfiguring attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands	Continued increasing demographic pressures and housing market challenges cause loss of dynamism and young talented exodus – leading to stagnation and decline

- 3.2 The outcome of the Evidence Review and Issues Paper broadly identified consistent messages around the following:
- 3.2.1 There is a lot of scope to support and grow the business, enterprise, and innovation eco-systems – from the nationally-important Magna Park campus and cluster to niche specialist businesses and brands (e.g. Joules, Royal Enfield) to SMEs and self-employment.
  - 3.2.2 The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 needs to be people-focused with strands that enrich young person experience and progression opportunities, healthy ageing, and which builds on the high quality of life and well-being baselines the district already offers.
  - 3.2.3 Place and community should be addressed differentially and distinctively for Market Harborough, Lutterworth, the larger villages, and rural areas – increasing business and employment opportunity in all; realising major visitor economy, hospitality, and leisure opportunities; and tackling affordable homes and community capacity-building challenges.
  - 3.2.4 Harborough district has a rich rural environment and already dynamic ‘green’ credentials. The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 should contribute strongly to natural capital, net gain, green growth and decarbonisation agendas, and proactively look to accelerate net-zero transitions.
  - 3.2.5 Improvements to transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity are critical to enabling Harborough district to fulfil its economic potential. Improvements should be supported directly and advocated strongly through HDCs and partners’ influencing and communications activities.
  - 3.2.6 The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 needs to be outward-looking – from collaborating with neighbours and influencing county and regional agendas to recognising the opportunities for capturing local value from out-commuting, business networks, and economic and transport corridors.
- 3.3 The Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 has four goals – broadly mirroring the four HDC Corporate Plan themes, these are:
- **(GO1) Economic:** Enable the growth of a resilient, agile, diverse, and entrepreneurial economy, with dynamic business clusters and ecosystems in priority areas of economic activity.
  - **(GO2) People:** Ensure the economy increases health and well-being opportunities for all district residents – from having the education & skills they need to access good jobs and employment to support for activity that assures health and well-being as they grow older.
  - **(GO3) Environment:** Encourage sustainable development good practice in all areas of economic activity, promoting green growth opportunities and a thriving low carbon business base.
  - **(GO4) Place:** Strengthen the economic vitality of and opportunities in and across Harborough District’s towns, large villages, and rural areas.

## 4. Implications of Decisions

### Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Economic Development Strategy aligns to three of the four corporate priorities, these are:
- Community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place.
  - Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations.
  - Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.

### Consultation

- 4.2 At the time of writing this report, a six-week public consultation is under way with key partners also being consulted including Canal & River Trust, Market Harborough Chamber of Commerce, Leicestershire County Council, Gazeley, Hothorpe Hall and Creative Harborough.
- 4.3 The Portfolio Holder has been consulted on the development of this report and the draft Strategy.
- 4.4 The consultation started on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2024 and will close on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024 for public and stakeholders.

### Financial

- 4.5 Once the Strategy has been finalised and the short and mid-term actions identified, these will require careful management as the Council has a small team with limited financial resources. Any financial impacts will be considered as part of the annual budget setting process.
- 4.6 Through ongoing monitoring of the strategy and demands on the service, it will go some way to ensure sufficient resources are available to support the implementation of the strategy.

### Legal

- 4.7 There are no legal implications relating to this report.

### Environmental Implications

- 4.8 One of the key goals of this strategy will be to encourage sustainable development good practice in all areas of economic activity, promoting green growth opportunities and a thriving low carbon business base.

### Risk Management

- 4.9 External Factors: Over the last few years, it has been demonstrated that the economic climate is volatile and unpredictable. Consequently, it is possible that unforeseen challenges may arise during this strategy period, which have not yet been anticipated. For instance, if the cost-of-living crisis persists, our attention and resources may need to be redirected towards supporting businesses and employment.

### Equalities Impact

- 4.10 An Equality Impact Analysis is currently being completed.

## **Data Protection**

4.11 There are no data protection issues with this report.

## **5. Alternative Options Considered**

5.1 Without the Economic Development Strategy 2024/31 the council will not have a strategic plan to support the current business community and to keep Harborough District as an attractive place for business.

## **6. Recommendation**

6.1 To consider and comment on the Economic Development Strategy 2024/31.

## **7. Background papers**

7.1 Not applicable for this report.







# Harborough District Council Economic Development Strategy

2024-31

[harborough.gov.uk](http://harborough.gov.uk)

PDFTRON





## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Executive Summary .....	2
Introduction .....	4
Background and context: .....	5
Global .....	5
National.....	5
Regional.....	5
Local .....	6
The purposes of the 2024-31 EDS:.....	7
Evidence Review and Issues Paper: .....	8
Vision: .....	11
Strategic goals and priorities .....	12
Goal 1 Economy.....	12
Goal 2: People .....	12
Goal 3: Environment .....	13
Goal 4: Place .....	13
Measuring and reviewing strategic progress .....	14
Implementation and delivery: .....	15
Strategic Leadership and partnership working.....	15
Data Collection and Analysis.....	15
Stakeholder Engagement.....	15
Infrastructure Investment.....	15
Business Support: .....	16
Skills Development:.....	16
Place-Making: .....	16
Marketing and Promotion: .....	16
Monitoring and Review:.....	16
Action Plan:.....	17
Monitoring and Review (M&R): .....	18
Next steps:.....	19
Concluding remarks: .....	19
Appendices .....	20
Appendix One: EDS Action Plan 2024-31 – April 2024 .....	20





Appendix Two: Evidence Review and Issues Paper – January 2024..... 24  
 Appendix Three: The Business Offer..... 24

## Executive Summary

The Economic Development Strategy (EDS) for 2024-31 aims to address the district’s challenges and opportunities in the mid-late 2020s. The Strategy is based on an Evidence Review and Issues Paper produced in early 2024. Based on the work to date, the vision for the district suggests:

**By 2031, Harborough District will be recognised and admired as a distinctive economic jewel of Leicestershire and the Midlands, offering residents, communities, and businesses opportunities to improve their prosperity and well-being in a dynamic and increasingly sustainable environment.**

To deliver against this vision, the EDS presents “a strategy and a process for planning, delivering and managing economic change in Harborough District that contributes to the prosperity, well-being and environmental ambitions of the district in a sustainable, inclusive and measurable way.”



In particular, the EDS proposes four strategic goals, each with several priorities, short-term focuses for action, and medium-term ambitions:

The **Economic Goal** aims to boost local productivity, attract investment, and establish the district as an attractive business destination by:

1. Boosting Magna Park’s role in promoting nationwide progress towards eco-friendly logistics while enhancing its contribution to overall growth.
2. Helping new industry clusters flourish by leveraging the district’s distinctive businesses and brands.
3. Supporting key sectors like tourism, agriculture, and technology.



4. Offering business support, guiding investment in infrastructure and lodging to foster business expansion.
5. Adjusting to changes after the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) transition to ensure that public policies match Harborough District's economic and business needs.

The **People Goal** seeks to:

1. Improve access to advanced skills training in areas without nearby colleges or universities.
2. Tackle disparities by focusing on affordable housing, transportation, and job skills.
3. Utilise the economic advantages of supporting healthy ageing and well-being, including healthcare and related initiatives.

The **Environment** and **Place** Goals aim to:

1. Tap into Harborough District's green economy, focusing on energy storage and achieving net-zero goals.
2. Encourage growth in industries related to ecosystem services by using the district's natural resources and biodiversity.
3. Develop Market Harborough, Lutterworth, and rural villages equally, enhancing their unique strengths, creating jobs, and improving transportation and digital connections.

**Measurement and Review:** The Economic Development Strategy (EDS) outlines how the Council will measure and review progress across the 2024-31 period. It emphasises a partnership approach, with Harborough District Council (HDC) playing key roles in community leadership, coordination, influence, and implementation.

**Consultation and Adoption:** The strategy is open for consultation until 10 June 2024. After that, HDC Scrutiny and Cabinet will consider the final draft and consultation contributions before the Council's final adoption in July. Feedback on the vision, mission, goals, priorities, and action plan is encouraged.

**Conclusion:** This Strategy consultation draft outlines growth and development agendas amid global and national uncertainties, aiming to steer Harborough District toward its ambitious vision.

HDC May 2024



## Final draft for consultation

Please note that references to Harborough in this document refer to the geography and communities covered by the whole Harborough District Council (HDC) area. Market Harborough is always referred to by its full civic name.

### Introduction

Given that the previous Strategy expired at the end of 2023, a new Strategy must be prepared to guide the Council and its partners' success. This document summarises the ongoing exercise to draft that replacement.

It proposes a 2024-31 Economic Development Strategy (EDS). The EDS identifies the significant challenges and opportunities with strong economic dimensions that Harborough District faces and how the Council and its partners will address these. It will run alongside the remaining period of the Harborough Local Plan (2011-31) to better align spatial and economic strategies.

The drafted Economic Development Strategy will be circulated for consultation during Spring 2024. This period will include opportunities for discussion and further development of it. The intention is to feed in the results of this consultation so that Harborough District Council can adopt a final EDS in the summer and launch it thereafter.



## Background and context:

The 2020s began with two of the most profound challenges for the UK in recent decades: Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. The pace, severity, and volatility of change have remained the same, with ongoing conflict in Europe, cost-of-living, disruptive national U-turns, and government changes, among others.

These 'big ticket' trends have profound impacts on districts like Harborough. An EDS must recognise those impacts, their interlocking character, and often their lack of definitive solutions.

For Harborough's communities and businesses, essential drivers of strategic change and how these might be recognised in the EDS 2024-31 can be split across four scales. These are:



### Global

- Rapid technological change leads to an increased demand for high-level digital skills due to the impact of AI on employment and labour markets.
- The climate emergency necessitates a focus on green economic growth and the decarbonisation of existing businesses and industries, driven by frequent extreme weather events and their impacts on human well-being.
- Geo-political, trade, and investment conflicts create challenges for Foreign Direct Investment and export-led growth, compounded by pressures of international migration impacting local social cohesion.
- Societal challenges include addressing future virus shocks, managing the long tail of COVID-19, and addressing underlying health conditions, which stimulate significant care needs and opportunities in the health economy, alongside demographic ageing pressures and competition for young talent.

### National

- The impending General Election and potential significant policy changes introduce uncertainties regarding the longevity of policies addressing critical economic issues such as net zero, inequalities, and well-being.
- Medium-term fiscal austerity is expected to prolong the tight financial squeeze on local authorities, alongside heightened expectations for significant public sector productivity improvements.
- Inequalities and the future of 'levelling-up' suggest that Harborough may not be a high priority for national programs, yet there remains an expectation that Economic Development Strategies will address local disadvantages.

### Regional

- There is a necessity to position Harborough prominently in discussions surrounding devolution and local government reform, which includes active participation in debates



regarding Leicester & Leicestershire devolution and post-Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) settlements.

- Highlighting Harborough's significance in key transport corridors, the logistics sector, and discussions about the natural capital and quality of life in the Midlands, it is important to emphasise collaboration with the Midlands Engine and engage in pan-regional partnership efforts.

## Local

- See Evidence Review and Issues Paper and relevant sections below.

The above does not claim to provide a comprehensive list of relevant global, national, and regional strategic drivers of Harborough's economy in general and the EDS in particular. However, the scale and pace of change strongly suggest that the 2024-31 EDS should be significantly different from its 2018-23 predecessor.



## The purposes of the 2024-31 EDS:

Good practice in EDS today tends to highlight the following key focuses, which have been included in this consultation draft:

**Resilience and managing rapid change:** The strategy will prioritise resilience and adaptability over traditional economic growth models, aiming to better handle disruption and volatility.

**Sustainability and Inclusion:** Modern EDS concentrates on promoting sustainability, inclusion, well-being, and creating quality job opportunities, in addition to focusing on conventional indicators like productivity, employment rates, and business growth.

**Changing and managing trends:** The strategy seeks to influence demographic trends, attract and retain talent, and raise Harborough's regional and Midland's profile through strategic high-profile developments and effective management of existing trends.

**Capitalising on Natural Assets:** Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the district's natural resources and space can be used to boost the economy. The EDS recognises market towns, large villages, and rural areas in its spatial approach to economic growth.

Moreover, the EDS should be even more explicit than its predecessor, stating that this is not merely the background underpinning of the Harborough District Council (HDC) Economic Development team's business plan. The EDS must:

- Set out the collective ambitions of those interested in Harborough's development and the main opportunities and challenges facing us in progressing those ambitions.
- Lay the foundations and baseline for a 'Team Harborough' approach to working collaboratively to deliver EDS goals and the economic dimensions of accompanying strategies like the Local Plan and Market Town masterplans, Tourism and Rural strategies, Climate Action Plan, etc.
- Build a whole-council approach to the EDS so that HDC influences external agendas and so the EDS makes economic contributions across the whole HDC Corporate Plan.
- Only then can the priorities and headline activities of the HDC Economic Development Team be determined.



## Evidence Review and Issues Paper:

A detailed Evidence Review and Issues Paper was produced in early 2024 and discussed within HDC and with a small group of significant role players. This is attached as an appendix. It thoroughly analyses the local economy and current trends, summarised in this high-level strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats matrix.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Affluent, high-performing district with high quality of life and environment and considerable vitality in many important core economic metrics - skills, occupational employment, jobs and enterprise density, resident wages, and household income	Typical non-metropolitan demographic challenges, major housing market pressures and tensions, lack of major business clusters anchored by global players and a well-defined innovation ecosystem, and no HE or even FE footprint
Well-located for Leicester, other East and West Midlands centres, with good connectivity to London and some regional airports	Not particularly well-placed to command policy attention and prioritisation from Government and LLEP compared to other L&L flagship places and developments
Seemingly not as vulnerable to pandemic, impacts and other potential shocks as many places – with very low levels of multiple deprivation and strong health and well-being	Economic strengths over-reliant on out-commuting and perhaps Magna Park. Local GVA, productivity and workplace wages are low and not growing particularly fast
Opportunities	Threats
Very well-positioned to take advantage of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life leveraging how well-connected it is to local cities and metropolitan centres	National/regional context pays little attention to Harborough District and low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity
Magna Park and its existing consents could offer an opportunity for step-change and transformation in economic profile and performance of the campus and district	Local complacency and resistance to change may inhibit ambition and necessary decisive, radical decision-making and delivery effectiveness
Market Harborough could create a new exemplary post-pandemic market town – together with reconfiguring attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands	Continued increasing demographic pressures and housing market challenges cause loss of dynamism and young talented exodus – leading to stagnation and decline

The SWOT analysis highlights the district's high quality of life, environmental vitality, and positive economic metrics such as skills, occupational employment, jobs, and enterprise density. However, it also faces ageing challenges, housing market pressures, a lack of major business clusters, and no Higher Education or Further Education (HE or FE) footprint of any scale.

The district is well-located. But perhaps because of this, economic strengths are over-reliant on out-commuting and Magna Park. Locally produced gross value added, productivity, and workplace wages are weak. Harborough District appears less vulnerable to potential shocks than many places but is not well-positioned to command policy attention and prioritisation from the government pan-regional and regional bodies compared to City and County (L&L) flagships and priorities.





The district is well-placed to take advantage of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life. However, low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity.

Magna Park and its existing planning consents offers an opportunity for step-change in the campus and district's economic profile and performance. Other high-profile niche businesses, like Joules and some in Market Harborough and Bruntingthorpe, have the potential to anchor wider developments.

The Emerging Local Plan sets a strategy for at least 15 years to shape what can be built and where it should go across Harborough District. Policies will outline the provision of employment land and development that is needed to help the local economy thrive, supporting job creation and business growth with the right infrastructure. Engagement in the development of new Local Plan by businesses is essential so that local needs are considered Market Harborough can position itself as a new exemplary post-pandemic 'middle-England' market town. Lutterworth, Broughton Astley, attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands enhance the district's overall offer.

The **Evidence Review and Issues Paper** presented two broad brush scenarios based on the level of EDS ambition.

At one level, Harborough District could be a quiet, low-key partner, off-pitch of the main Leicester and Leicestershire (L&L) transformers (City, Airport/Gateway, Food Cluster, Professional & Business Services, Hinckley, Loughborough), and just slightly outside the major national Oxford2Cambridge Arc priority. It could focus on retaining its successful quality of life based on out commuting and older residents with reasonable incomes. It could live with Magna Park's expansion and focus on minimising its negative externalities. And that choice requires one type of economic strategy.

At another level, though, the district could want to be known nationally and even beyond as a modern, vibrant district, welcoming talent, offering excellent and affordable quality of life and job opportunities, alongside ease of access to Leicester and major metropolitan centres. In this scenario:

- Market Harborough would be a nationally premier post-pandemic market town – maximising its connections to Leicester, Leicestershire, Rutland, Northamptonshire, and London.
- Lutterworth, Broughton Astley and the villages would progress town centre and neighbourhood plan where available to maximise their offer as high-quality residential communities and visitor economies.
- Magna Park (MP) will be the highest profile pacesetter (nationally) in net-zero logistics as a diversified campus with major innovation and education components.
- The enterprise and innovation focus beyond MP might seek to build on the quirky distinctive brands (like Joules, Bruntingthorpe), green and visitor economy opportunity.
- Major investment would be sought for affordable and market housing to attract and retain young talent.
- Digital investments would create step-change in home and hybrid working and even 'digital nomad' opportunities, whilst also improving local business competitiveness.





The paper was discussed within HDC and with significant role players over the January – March period. What came out of this were broadly consistent messages around the following:

- The initial paper presents a recognisable picture of the district and its key issues at a level of detail and with no significant omissions in terms of proceeding to draft the EDS.
- There is a lot of scope to support and grow the business, enterprise, and innovation eco-systems – from the nationally-important Magna Park campus and cluster to niche specialist businesses and brands (e.g. Joules, Royal Enfield) to SMEs and self-employment.
- The EDS needs to be people-focused with strands that enrich young person experience and progression opportunities, healthy ageing, and which builds on the high quality of life and well-being baselines the district already offers.
- Place and community should be addressed differentially and distinctively for Market Harborough, Lutterworth, the larger villages, and rural areas – increasing business and employment opportunity in all; realising major visitor economy, hospitality, and leisure opportunities; and tackling affordable homes and community capacity-building challenges.
- Harborough District has a rich rural environment and already dynamic ‘green’ credentials. The EDS should contribute strongly to natural capital, net gain, green growth, and decarbonisation agendas, and proactively look to accelerate net-zero transitions.
- Improvements to transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity are critical to enabling Harborough District to fulfil its economic potential. Improvements should be supported directly and advocated strongly through HDCs and partners’ influencing and communications activities.
- The EDS needs to be outward-looking – from collaborating with neighbours and influencing county and regional agendas to recognising the opportunities for capturing local value from out-commuting, business networks, and economic and transport corridors.

The findings of the Evidence Review and Issues Paper, and the initial feedback reported above have determined the proposed [Vision](#), [Goals](#), [Priorities](#) and [Action Plan](#) outlined below.



## Vision:

The vision of the expired 2018-23 Economic Development Strategy (EDS) was “By 2023 Harborough District’s economy will have established a robust reputation as a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and attractive place to do business. Sustainable employment opportunities and district-wide prosperity will be achieved by developing home-grown enterprises and proactively attracting high-value businesses to the area.”

The HDC Corporate Plan 2022-32 vision is “Working with our communities we will build a future for the people of Harborough District that gives the best life opportunities through community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place; promoting health and well-being and encouraging healthy life choices; creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations; and supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.”

There is enduring merit in both these visions, and the new EDS will contribute to both. The challenge is to define a relevant and distinctive economic vision for 2024-31 that retains aspiration, motivates, and enthuses local people, communities, and economic role players, and reflects the insights of the development work presented above.

This draft is proposing to consult on and work up the following vision statement:

*“By 2031, Harborough District will be recognised and admired as a distinctive economic jewel of Leicestershire and the Midlands, offering all residents, communities and businesses opportunities to improve their prosperity and well-being in a dynamic and increasingly sustainable environment.”*

**EDS Mission:** Neither the 2018-23 EDS nor the Corporate Plan 2022-32 have explicit missions. But given the way EDS have changed in character in the 2020s and moves towards mission-led public policy – not least in the Levelling Up White Paper 2022 (LUWP), there is merit in the EDS having a mission that distinguishes it from the other plans and strategies of Harborough District and HDC.

For this draft final strategy, it is proposed to consult on and work up the following mission statement:

*“The EDS is a strategy and a process for planning, delivering and managing economic change and opportunity in Harborough District that contributes to prosperity, well-being and environmental ambitions in a sustainable, inclusive and measurable way.”*



## Strategic goals and priorities

The EDS has four goals – broadly mirroring the four HDC Corporate Plan themes, and the ‘triple bottom line’ of (in our case) ‘People, Planet and Prosperity’:

**Goal 1 Economy:** Enable the growth of a resilient, agile, diverse, and entrepreneurial economy, with dynamic business clusters and ecosystems in priority areas of economic activity.

**Goal 2 People:** Ensure the economy increases health and well-being opportunities for all district residents – from having the education & skills they need to access good jobs and employment to support for activity that assures health and well-being as they grow older.

**Goal 3 Environment:** Encourage sustainable development good practice in all areas of economic activity, promoting green growth opportunities and a thriving low carbon business base.

**Goal 4 Place:** Strengthen the economic vitality of and opportunities in and across Harborough District’s towns, large villages, and rural areas.

The major priorities and indicators of achievement for each Goal are outlined below. It is important the EDS has a manageable number of priorities – not everything can be a priority:

### Goal 1: Economy

#### Major priorities

- Strengthening local economic productivity, competitiveness, and entrepreneurialism.
- Growing the local business base and ensuring access to space and facilities to enable that growth.
- Making the most of the Magna Park cluster and campus and developing other niche high-value clusters.
- Ensuring Harborough District is well-positioned for post-LEP economic development policies and support.

#### Indicators of achievement

- Local GVA, productivity/hour, and local wage rates
- Business start-up, survival & density rates, and self-employment metrics
- Business/commercial property supply
- Cluster and network analyses.
- Access to and take up of Growth Hub and further specialist support.
- Attraction and spending of LED (Local Economic Development) support funds and programmes.
- Ultrafast and Full Fibre to Premises digital access and business take-up rates.

### Goal 2: People

#### Major priorities

- Increase local access to FE, HE, and workforce skills programmes & training, especially in priority skills.
- Encourage increased household income, especially in less affluent people and families.
- Support the reduction of health and skills inequalities through targeted support for priority peoples and communities.



- Grow the local health and care sector, and access to contemporary services like digital health.

#### Indicators of achievement

- Skills levels in the resident population
- Access to and take up of vocational, technical, apprenticeship, digital and workforce skills programmes.
- Proportion of 'good jobs' employment and Real Living Wage employment
- Gross Domestic Household Income levels for lower-income deciles
- Health inequalities & Index of Multiple Deprivation scores
- Growth in local health & care SMEs (including childcare)

### Goal 3: Environment

#### Major priorities

- Accelerate delivery of decarbonisation and net-zero targets – especially in business-facing activities.
- Realise economic benefits of natural capital and net gain assets and capabilities.
- Grow environmental goods and services sector and 'green growth' cluster and ecosystem.

#### Indicators of achievement

- CO2 emissions per capita
- Trends in energy efficiency and renewable sources by AEA
- Environment net gain tracking of EDS development measures
- Size and network participation of Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services business cluster

### Goal 4: Place

#### Major priorities

- Progress Market Harborough and Lutterworth masterplans and improve town vitality scores.
- Ensure large villages and rural communities offer diverse business and employment opportunities.
- Support growth of the visitor economy, leisure, and hospitality industries
- Improve intra-district transport, digital services and infrastructure whilst influencing developments on major transport corridors to city regions and London.
- Encourage supply & diversity of affordable homes.

#### Indicators of achievement

- Market Harborough & Lutterworth town vitality
- Visitor numbers and spend, leisure and hospitality sector growth.
- Quality and availability of road and public transport links to and between Harborough District town and villages and major employment centres
- Increased housing affordability for groups excluded from market sector.



## Measuring and reviewing strategic progress

The EDS adopt a manageable number of measures to track strategic progress against the goals and priorities above. Between 5-6 measures to be chosen per goal, this will give the EDS, HDC and partners a set of +/-20 outcome measures in a bespoke index which can be periodically measured (annually) in a traffic light system to denote progress and areas for concern. However, Harborough District performance should also be compared and benchmarked to provide a fuller picture of how well the district is performing.

There are several ways of doing this. At least three types of benchmarks should be considered:

**Neighbours, regional and national aggregates:** Routinely the EDS strategic measures of performance should be compared to the average of Leicestershire districts, and the East Midlands and the UK/England average excluding London.

**Statistical neighbours:** Statistical neighbours form LA geographies with similar socio-economic characteristics to Harborough District. The two looked at for this version of the EDS are both on LG Inform and include the Experian Mosaic and the CIPFA statistical neighbours' cohorts. District local authorities (LAs) in both HDC cohorts are Bromsgrove, East Hampshire, Stratford-on-Avon, Test Valley, Uttlesford and Wychavon. It is recommended that in addition to geographical neighbours, these six LAs are included in the EDS benchmarking performance monitoring system.

**'Peers in prestige':** The most difficult of the three classes of comparator are geographies that Harborough role players admire and look to for models of change and inspiration. There is some case regionally for Rutland, and for Stratford-upon-Avon from the statistical neighbours. However, it might also make sense to explore one or two international comparators for insights from European and even global comparator regions with ambitions or context to which Harborough District aspires – for instance, a Scandinavian region for social contract type of contexts or a US one for competitiveness. This is not necessarily a detailed exercise, but 'peers in prestige' are a useful way of thinking about Harborough's own ambitions and performance.



## Implementation and delivery:

The EDS is an overall economic narrative for the whole of Harborough District, which requires the contributions of many partners to deliver and progress. However, HDC recognises its strategic and community leadership role as the primary owner of the narrative, convenor and enabler of many organisations who are key contributors to the district's economic success.

To discharge these roles, HDC shall use both its influencing and direct delivery roles. This section outlines the key steps and considerations for successful EDS implementation. In particular:

### Strategic Leadership and partnership working

HDC will look to build the 'Team Harborough' leadership team:

- We will convene either a formal or an informal "Growth Board" type arrangement to oversee planning, delivery, and review of the EDS and associated economic plans and programmes.
- Collaborate and look to influence Leicester & Leicestershire (L&L) partners, neighbouring, regional, and national bodies, to ensure successor Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) arrangements work well for the district, and that other joint working facilitates resource-bidding and sharing, joint initiatives, and alignment of strategies.

### Data Collection and Analysis

HDC will collect relevant data on the local economy, including employment trends, industry sectors, infrastructure, and skills to inform decision-making, help identify and lobby for growth opportunities, and to fill any gaps left by the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) and its annual district-based economic profiles.

### Stakeholder Engagement

HDC will engage with key stakeholders, including local businesses, community organisations, educational institutions, and residents through:

- Regular consultations, workshops, and forums to gather insights, identify priorities, and build consensus.
- Keeping under review and participating in national, regional, and local key account management systems with important businesses and major employers.

### Infrastructure Investment

HDC will prioritise our influencing roles and even, where resources allow, direct investment contributions and other resources to:

- Progress priority infrastructure projects that enhance connectivity (e.g. road improvements, broadband expansion, and public transportation),
- Improve business accommodation and facilities (e.g. grow on accommodation, local hybrid working facilities).
- Increase supply of homes – especially affordable housing.
- Support priority growth sectors including tourism and visitor economy, agriculture and land-based, logistics; niche clusters (like energy storage/net zero) and technology, enhance natural capital and ecosystem services provision, and education, skills, and innovation eco-systems.
- Signpost, leverage, and build capacity for accessing philanthropic and other community funding (like the Magna Park Community Fund) with economic purposes.





## **Business Support:**

HDC will provide tailored support to local businesses, including signposting and assistance to access funding, training, and other benefits from future Growth Hub and specialist business, enterprise, and innovation support services. Harborough Innovation Centre (HIC) and any Innovation Centre established in and around Magna Park will nurture startups and SMEs and connect both tenants and wider networks into national and regional business growth communities.

## **Skills Development:**

HDC will collaborate with educational institutions, including remote HE and FE, to address higher level skills gaps, apprenticeship programs, vocational training, and lifelong learning opportunities – including making the most of education and skills opportunities arising in and out of Magna Park.

## **Place-Making:**

HDC will use its planning powers and influencing roles with partners, town forums, parish councils and others to enhance the district's attractiveness by investing in public and green spaces, cultural amenities, heritage preservation, and town and village centres' economic vitality and social infrastructure efforts.

## **Marketing and Promotion:**

HDC will work with EDS partners to actively promote the district as an investment and visitor destination. Marketing campaigns, events, showcases, and trade events will raise awareness for investors (public and private), and grow the visitor economy.

## **Monitoring and Review:**

HDC will agree EDS performance indicators with the 'Team Harborough' Forum to track EDS progress. Regular reviews and adjustments will ensure the strategy remains relevant and effective.

Implementation and delivery of the EDS requires structures and processes in each of the nine areas outlined above. HDC will play a key role in ensuring that all nine are addressed. But buy-in and co-ownership from other public, private and community role players cannot be understated. The consultation and workshops on this draft strategy will be an important part of this co-design process.



## Action Plan:

An initial high-level action plan for delivering these agendas is outlined in Appendix One. Both short-term interventions and medium-term ambitions are phrased to be consistent with either high ambition or incremental change scenarios outlined in the Evidence Review and Issues Paper. Under either scenario, the EDS agenda is broad and requires capacity well beyond the HDC Economic Development Team. When the high-level plan goes to its next more detailed iteration, tasks and accountabilities will need to be allocated across the whole Council, and on occasion to 'Team Harborough' partners. This is the case with any contemporary EDS.

The Plan also suggests a small number of big ticket 'missions' should the Council and partners wish to adopt a high ambition, disruptive change scenario, and if they have some confidence this can be resourced. Possible transformational missions include Magna Park's wider roles, seeking a local HE/FE presence at scale in the district, or even a single-minded focus on green growth, natural capital, and biodiversity net-gain. Whether to go down one or more of these routes will be discussed further during the consultation phase on this document.





## Monitoring and Review (M&R):

The monitoring and review process has already been referenced above. It is essential to ensure the strategy's effectiveness and alignment with the four economic goals the EDS proposes. The framework needs to be light touch, but robust enough to ensure that the EDS remains dynamic, responsive, and effective in driving sustainable economic growth and prosperity across the whole district.

The M&R framework below outlines key components for monitoring and evaluating the EDS:

**Performance Indicators:** A set of key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned with the EDS goals and priorities will be agreed from the longlist in the goals and priorities section. The final EDS will establish the baseline for the preferred basket of KPIs, track and analyse data on them no less than annually – akin to the former LLEP district profiles.

**'Team Harborough' and Stakeholder Engagement:** HDC will convene periodic Team Harborough forums to discuss progress and issues arising, alongside more focused dialogue with stakeholders on specific issues and opportunities as they arise during the EDS implementation period.

**Annual Progress Reports:** An annual progress report providing an overview of EDS implementation, highlighting achievements, new opportunities, challenges, and areas of concern will be prepared, presented, and discussed with Team Harborough and other relevant stakeholders.

**Benchmarking and Comparison:** As stated above, the EDS will benchmark the district's performance against neighbouring districts, regional averages, and national indicators, and also compare progress against statistical neighbours and peers in prestige to identify areas of strength and areas needing attention.

**Review Mechanism:** HDC will consult with Team Harborough on conducting periodic reviews of the EDS to evaluate its relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with changing economic landscapes and priorities.

**Adaptation and Continuous Improvement:** In the light of 1-5, the EDS will remain flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances, continuously seeking opportunities for improvement, innovation, and collaboration to enhance the EDS's impact on the district's economic development.



## Next steps:

This is the draft final EDS for consultation. It has been formulated following an Evidence Review and Issues Paper, and initial discussions on this preliminary document.

This consultation draft suggests vision and mission statements to shape the EDS overall, four goals, sixteen priorities, and a range of possible short- and medium-term interventions. It outlines how EDS progress can be measured and how it can be kept relevant and 'live' over the 2024-31 period. It proposes a 'Team Harborough' partnership approach, with HDC delivering its community leadership, convening, influencing and direct delivery roles. The Council's Economic Development Team will major on several priorities and actions to be decided at the final stage of the EDS process. However, EDS is a whole-district strategy, entailing a whole council approach with partners.

The strategy will be open as a consultation draft until 10 June 2024 following which it shall be considered by HDC Scrutiny and Cabinet prior to final adoption by the Council during July and a formal launch thereafter.

We are also available for bespoke online and face-to-face meetings. You may wish to join one of our themed workshops in early June focused on Economic and Green Growth (essentially Goals 1 and 3), Place and Tourism (essentially Goal 4), and People and connectivity (essentially Goal 2 and particularly PL04) – although all the workshops will enable participants to contribute to co-design of the whole final strategy.

We welcome comments and suggestions on anything presented in this document. We would like your response to the vision, mission, goals, priorities, and high-level action plan. What areas of the EDS do you strongly endorse, where are your concerns, and is anything missing? How do you think EDS progress should be measured and reported? What are the KPIs that matter most in this endeavour? And finally, who needs to be in the Team Harborough grouping? And what should HDC's specific economic priorities be in general and the Economic Development Team's in particular?

## Concluding remarks:

Crafting and adopting the EDS in a period of such uncertainty and in the shadow of a general election might be considered substantial risk. But it is also entirely appropriate and a sensible approach to managing and mitigating the risks of major global, national, and local changes.

Harborough District needs to set out its stall in the face of the changes outlined. This EDS is a best endeavour approach to doing this sensibly and flexibly in Spring 2024. It also sets out how the EDS can adapt and evolve over the coming period.

In this spirit, the consultation draft is presented to you, and we look forward to your contributions to bringing a final fit-for-purpose EDS to fruition.

HDC

May 2024

# Harborough District Council

## Economic Development Strategy - Appendices



### Appendices

#### Appendix One: EDS Action Plan 2024-31 – April 2024

Goal and Priority	What are we trying to achieve
<p>Economy 1 – Strengthening local economic productivity, competitiveness, and entrepreneurialism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prosperity, competitiveness, enterprise are fundamental building blocks for economic success and prosperity.</li> <li>➤ Increasing convergence with high-performing comparator districts ('peers of prestige').</li> <li>➤ Increase local opportunity alternatives to out-commuting.</li> <li>➤ Develop Harborough District positioning and investment-ready propositions for accessing future public support for growth and development.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District has highly valued niche economic roles in Midlands Engine and is the location of choice for investment and services in those roles.</li> </ul>
<p>Economy 2 – Growing the local business base and access to business accommodation and facilities that enable business growth locally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Provide credible alternatives to out-commuting.</li> <li>➤ Enable local businesses to grow locally.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District seen as a dynamic, innovative place with a supportive environment where businesses can achieve their ambitions.</li> <li>➤ Exploration and feasibility analyses of grow-on accommodation options.</li> <li>➤ Increase understanding of business demand of space requirements for business growth.</li> <li>➤ Proactive account management.</li> <li>➤ Major rises in the rankings of business density, business growth and propensity to innovate metrics.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District is known for its 'open for business' ethos.</li> </ul>
<p>Economy 3 – Making the most of the Magna Park (MP) cluster/ campus and developing other niche high-value clusters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Magna Park (MP) is nationally significant &amp; provides major business multipliers both on the campus itself and more widely throughout the district.</li> <li>➤ Other niche businesses that can anchor new high-growth clusters identified and propositions developed that leverage and grow the impact of these high-value niche businesses (e.g. Royal Enfield, Joules, TGW, etc).</li> <li>➤ Agree delivery of additional MP Campus innovation &amp; skills provision</li> <li>➤ Identify and develop propositions for 2-3 other priority niche clusters and networks (not necessarily those mentioned in the previous cell).</li> <li>➤ MP as the premier and an exemplary net-zero Logistics Part in the UK and Europe.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District is known for its successful niche industries and purposeful cluster-building strategies.</li> </ul>

# Harborough District Council

## Economic Development Strategy - Appendices



<p>Economy 4 – Ensuring Harborough District is well-positioned for post-LLEP economic development policies and support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Raise Harborough District's influence and priority compared to other L&amp;L flagships to influence coming public policy changes to Harborough's benefit.</li> <li>➤ Attract new resources and services to drive Harborough District's growth &amp; development.</li> <li>➤ Contribute proactively to LLEP successor arrangements.</li> <li>➤ Advocate EDS priorities locally and nationally post-general election.</li> <li>➤ Attract new and increasing investment resources for EDS priorities.</li> <li>➤ Increasing business take-up of public support for business growth.</li> </ul>
<p>People 1 – Increase local access to FE, HE, and workforce skills training, especially in priority growth areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Find solutions to redress the absence of local HE and FE at scale in the district.</li> <li>➤ Deliver step-change in local access to higher-level skills.</li> <li>➤ Attract, retain, and develop the local talent that businesses need.</li> <li>➤ Define and deliver the MP opportunities for skills development.</li> <li>➤ Dialogue with sub-regional HE and FE providers about local provision.</li> <li>➤ Ensure future Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) understand and address Harborough skills priorities.</li> <li>➤ The district is known as a place where you can fully develop and deploy your talents.</li> </ul>
<p>People 2 – Ensure programmes consider improving household incomes, reducing health and skills inequalities when prioritising interventions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Support the reduction of Harborough District's high levels of inequalities and poverty by providing employment opportunities, work readiness, and other relevant support for poorer groups.</li> <li>➤ Increase understanding of inequality &amp; poverty to better design interventions to enable less-advantaged communities are better able to participate in and benefit from Harborough District's economic success.</li> <li>➤ Ensure Harborough District can credibly claim to be a leading rural district in delivering inclusive growth policies and practice.</li> <li>➤ Increase understanding of the needs of priority groups in order to design and promote interventions to assist them.</li> </ul>

# Harborough District Council

## Economic Development Strategy - Appendices



<p>People 3 – Grow the local health and care sector, with access to new services like digi-health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Improve scale, local offer and productivity of the large local health and care sectors.</li> <li>➤ Deliver healthy aging and agendas like digi-health for both well-being and economic vitality purposes.</li> <li>➤ Support life sciences, health &amp; care cluster work in district/ L&amp;L.</li> <li>➤ Identify proposals for local investment.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District is known as a good place for healthy aging, with access to valued relevant private and community services.</li> </ul>
<p>Environment 1 – Accelerate delivery of decarbonisation and net-zero targets – especially in business-facing activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Demonstrate tangible progress towards meeting statutory targets, regional and local ambitions, and expectations of local authorities with regards to net zero.</li> <li>➤ Realise the green growth economic and business dividends locally from national, regional and L&amp;L green growth policies rather than through external businesses delivering them locally.</li> <li>➤ Understand and build on energy storage &amp; net-zero mini-clusters.</li> <li>➤ Participate in regional and national green growth &amp; net-zero programmes.</li> <li>➤ Build a credible green growth cluster.</li> <li>➤ MP as premier net-zero logistics park.</li> <li>➤ At the forefront of L&amp;L and Midlands Engine (ME) rural decarbonisation performance.</li> </ul>
<p>Environment 2 – Realise economic benefits of natural capital and net gain assets and capabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Build the green credentials of Harborough District’s quality of life and as a visitor destination by leveraging the considerable natural capital and biodiversity assets as one of Harborough’s unique selling propositions (USPs).</li> <li>➤ Develop relations with Midlands Nature &amp; other partners to understand better the potential for natural capital/ biodiversity economic programmes.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District’s rural offer is well-managed and environmental stewardship is a core part of the values of residents and businesses.</li> </ul>

# Harborough District Council

## Economic Development Strategy - Appendices



<p>Environment 3 – Grow environmental goods &amp; services sector, ‘green growth’ cluster and ecosystem(s)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A dynamic green growth sector with distinctive, nascent niche clusters (e.g. net-zero/energy storage) and new niches in ‘green tourism’ and ecosystems industries.</li> <li>➤ Increase understanding of the nascent sub-sectors and help them participate fully in regional and national initiatives.</li> <li>➤ Having several ‘green growth’ clusters of excellence able to provide services regionally and beyond.</li> <li>➤ Recognisable L&amp;L &amp; Midlands Engine (ME) niche roles.</li> </ul>
<p>Place 1 – Progress Market Harborough and Lutterworth masterplans and improve town vitality scores.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Both market towns are perceived as locations of choice for living and working, welcoming significant visitor numbers &amp; spending – with Market Harborough as an exemplary ‘middle-England’ market town and Lutterworth as a growing town and service provider for its wide catchment.</li> <li>➤ Progress the Town Masterplans.</li> <li>➤ Feasibility of development &amp; investment options in both towns.</li> <li>➤ Support proactive town centre management in both towns.</li> <li>➤ Market Harborough as an exemplary dynamic market town with national profile and reputation.</li> <li>➤ Lutterworth accommodates housing growth with increasing pride in place.</li> </ul>
<p>Place 2 – Ensure large villages and rural areas offer diverse business and employment opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Vibrant large villages and living rural communities with good access to employment opportunities and public services spread the district’s growth spatially and make the most of Harborough’s rural offer.</li> <li>➤ Explore opportunities to repurpose community spaces (e.g. village halls, libraries) for hot-desking, public services access &amp; employment uses.</li> <li>➤ High quality of life and employment offers in all major settlements – supporting growth of the visitor and leisure economy.</li> </ul>



# Harborough District Council

## Economic Development Strategy - Appendices



<p>Place 3 – Support the growth of the visitor economy, leisure, and hospitality industries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ An expanding visitor and leisure sectors offering diverse and all-year services sustainably.</li> <li>➤ Improving the depth and breadth of Harborough District’s offer, especially for overnight visitors.</li> <li>➤ Build Tourism &amp; Hospitality Forum(s).</li> <li>➤ Strengthen/Coordinate events programme.</li> <li>➤ Increase Visit Leicester, the local visitor economy partnership.</li> <li>➤ Increase visitor numbers and spend on high-value and sustainable visitor economy and leisure products &amp; services.</li> </ul>
<p>Place 4 – Improve intra-district transport, digital services, and infrastructure, influencing developments on major corridors to city regions &amp; London</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Make the economy of the district more cohesive and connected through increasing intra-district transport options, especially east-west for local labour markets.</li> <li>➤ Improve digital infrastructure, making more of quite high provider density capabilities in the district.</li> <li>➤ Realise economic and business digital dividends from higher qualities and bandwidth of digital infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>➤ Participate proactively in L&amp;L Transport and Digital partnerships.</li> <li>➤ Support local employers, transport, and digital service providers to identify connectivity solutions.</li> <li>➤ A well-connected district physically with high-quality digital infrastructure and services that allows Harborough District to realise the benefits of digital and AI transitions.</li> </ul>
<p>Place 5 – Increase the supply and diversity of affordable homes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Increase in housing choices – especially for poorer and younger families – to reduce the district’s housing affordability ratios – currently the widest in L&amp;L.</li> <li>➤ Deliver Local Plan housing numbers.</li> <li>➤ Identify and bring to market new sites for mixed-use development, intervening directly when appropriate.</li> <li>➤ Harborough District is known for delivering Local Plan housing targets and providing good homes across the breadth of its population and communities.</li> </ul>

### Appendix Two: Evidence Review and Issues Paper – January 2024

[EDS Evidence Review and Issues Paper 2024 - 31.docx](#)



## Appendix Three: The Business Offer

HDC has set out its roles and responsibilities for leading and enabling delivery of the EDS in the Implementation chapter of the document. With regards to businesses and employers, we shall:

Your participation in the district’s growth and development is absolutely critical. HDC’s open door objective in *Economy 2* is always available, and we hope you shall use it. We value periodic discussions with single or groups of businesses about issues that are important to you, changes you are confronting or wish to make.

Please also feel free to take advantage of these specific collaboration opportunities:

Support	If you need assistance navigating business operations, visit <a href="http://www.investinharborough.com/advice">www.investinharborough.com/advice</a> for tailored support and resources.
Events	Share details and images of your events with us at <a href="http://www.visitharborough.com/events">www.visitharborough.com/events</a> to be featured on our events calendar.
News	Sign up for our business bulletin at <a href="http://www.harborough.gov.uk/businessnews">www.harborough.gov.uk/businessnews</a> to receive updates, insights, and announcements relevant to the local business community.
Funding	Explore external funding options at <a href="http://www.harborough.gov.uk/grantfinder">www.harborough.gov.uk/grantfinder</a> to support your business ventures.
Recruitment	Let us know about vacant roles or your interest in taking on apprenticeships and we can promote these via <a href="http://www.investinharborough.com/harboroughjobs">www.investinharborough.com/harboroughjobs</a> to connect with potential candidates.

Participate in local business initiatives and events to embrace the spirit of collaboration and community engagement. Whether through the Harbs Collective, Lutterworth Town Team, Heritage Open Days, Leicester Comedy Festival—Harborough’s Big Weekend, Big Green Week, or Harborough Job Fairs, there are myriad opportunities to connect, learn, and grow together.

Your participation is vital in creating a thriving business environment and vibrant community. We appreciate your support and involvement in our shared endeavour for progress and prosperity.



# Economic Development Strategy 2024 - 2031



## Evidence Review and Issues Paper

### Executive Summary

Harborough District Council (HDC) is undertaking work to produce and agree a new Economic Development Strategy (EDS) to run concurrent with the Local Plan to 2031. This Evidence Review and Issues Paper is the first stage in that process. It is intended to stimulate debate and discussion on Harborough District's economic priorities; on how HDC, partners and stakeholders can positively shape the district's future; and specifically on the focus of the HDC Economic Development team going forward.

The evidence reviews and contextual analysis has enabled the drafting of a SWOT matrix:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affluent, high performing district with high quality of life and environment and considerable vitality in many important core economic metrics - skills, occupational employment, jobs and enterprise density, resident wages, and household income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typical non-metropolitan demographic challenges, major housing market pressures and tensions, lack of major business clusters anchored by global players and a well-defined innovation eco-system, and no HE or even FE footprint</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-located for Leicester, other East and West Midlands centres, with good connectivity to London and some regional airports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not particularly well-placed to command policy attention and prioritisation from Government and LLEP compared to other L&amp;L flagship places and developments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seemingly not as vulnerable to pandemic, impacts and other potential shocks as many places – with extremely low levels of multiple deprivation and strong health and wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic strengths over-reliant on out-commuting and perhaps Magna Park. Local GVA, productivity and workplace wages are low and not growing particularly fast</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very well-positioned to take advantage of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life leveraging how well-connected it is to local cities and metropolitan centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National/regional context pays little attention to Harborough District and low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Magna Park and its existing consents could offer an opportunity for step-change and transformation in economic profile and performance of the campus and district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local complacency and resistance to change may inhibit ambition and necessary decisive, radical decision-making and delivery effectiveness</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market Harborough could create a new exemplary post-pandemic market town – together with reconfiguring attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued increasing demographic pressures and housing market challenges cause loss of dynamism and young talented exodus – leading to stagnation and decline</li> </ul>

Harborough District is facing a radically new context to that in which the 2018-23 EDS was drafted and approved. Post-pandemic and post-Brexit, with strong emphases on net zero and levelling up, technological developments like AI, major fiscal constraints, an impending national election, and devolution opportunities, require a new approach. The EDS 2024-31 will provide this.



Harborough District enters this period with many strong economic performance metrics. Based on the evidence review and contextual analysis, The district is affluent, with high quality of life and environment, and considerable vitality in important factors like skills, occupational employment, jobs and enterprise density, resident wages, and household income.

The district is well-located for Leicester, other East and West Midlands centres, with good connectivity to London and some regional airports. Magna Park is a nationally significant logistics hub, and its existing consents offer an opportunity for step-change and transformation in the economic profile and performance of its own campus and the district. More widely, with the market towns, villages and rural areas, Harborough district is very well-positioned to take advantage of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life leveraging how well-connected it is to local cities and metropolitan centres.

However, Harborough District also suffers from typical non-metropolitan demographic challenges of aging, major housing market pressures and tensions, lack of business clusters at scale outside Magna Park, a small innovation eco-system, and no HE or even FE footprint. Its economic success is over-reliant on out-commuting, and the lack of local education and employment opportunity does lead to an exodus of young talent. Although superficially economic vitality looks strong, the evidence review also surfaces trends that are not as positive as neighbouring areas and deficits in key future-facing capabilities like digital infrastructure.

Overall, the district and the council struggle to command policy attention and prioritisation from Government, Midlands Engine and the Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) compared to other L&L flagship places and developments. National and regional context pays little attention to Harborough District and to Leicestershire as a whole. Low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and capacity to deliver step change.

The Evidence Review is available in full below and is considered extensive enough to identify the major strategic questions and issues that the new EDS will need to address. These questions include the balance between orthodox goals like productivity and economic growth with decarbonisation and inclusion; how far to focus on indigenous business growth or recognise the district's potential as a location for out commuting, hybrid and home working; and how far the EDS should be vision-led with 2-3 big ticket changes or a longer shopping list of projects responding to funding opportunities nationally and regionally.

The Issues Paper sections seek feedback on how ambitious and radical the new EDS should seek to be. At one level, Harborough District could be a quiet, low-key partner, off-pitch of the main LLEP transformers (City, Airport/Gateway, Food Cluster, Professional & Business Services, Hinckley, Loughborough), and just slightly outside the major national Oxford2Cambridge Arc priority. At another level, though, the district could want to be known nationally and even beyond as a modern vibrant district, welcoming talent, offering excellent and affordable quality of life and job opportunities, alongside ease of access to Leicester and major metropolitan centres.

In discussing the Issues Paper, we will be seeking your views on what Harborough District wishes to be known for as an economy in the future; how ambitious the EDS should be; and what major strategic choices will need to be resolved in the EDS formulation exercise. The paper concludes with two scenarios for the future – one broadly incremental, and one more about step-up and step-change in performance and local capabilities. Your feedback on these analyses and participation in the impending consultation and co-design exercises is now sought.

Whilst we welcome all feedback and comments, your thoughts on the following questions which are positioned at relevant points in the report will be particularly welcome:



**Q1. What are your thoughts on Harborough District's opportunities and challenges of the late-2020s, and what would you like to see in the district's overall vision?**

**Q2. Does the Evidence Review (including the annex) identify the major data sources relevant to the EDS? If not, what is omitted or interpreted inadequately?**

**Q3. Does the SWOT summarise the district's key characteristics accurately? What is inaccurate, omitted and/or in need of qualification? What other issues would be most important if we expanded the table from three strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to four or five each?'**

**Q4. How should the overall economic health and performance of the district be measured, and what are the key indicators of success in this EDS?**

**Q5. In your opinion, "What does Harborough District wish to be known for as an economy in the future, and how ambitious should the 2024-31 strategy be in terms of the balance between incremental and step-change?**

**Q6. Should there be some sort of refreshed Economic Growth Board or Panel (of HDC and other major economic role players locally) to take ownership of progressing and delivering the new strategy?**

**Q7. What do you see as the priorities of Harborough District Council as a whole and the HDC Economic Development Team in particular for economic development to 2031?**

**Q8. Do you have further comments on the issues raised in this paper or on the process going forward? Are there any major considerations you believe we have omitted?**

Please respond to.....

**Introduction and purpose:** Harborough District Council's (HDC) existing economic development strategy (EDS) ran from 2018-23. HDC is therefore undertaking work to produce and agree a new EDS for the medium term, to run concurrent with the Local Plan to 2031.

This paper is the first formal stage in that process – an Evidence Review and Issues Paper.

The economic Evidence Review summarises the existing data and research on the district's economic performance, the context in which that performance is being achieved, and any trend data that is noteworthy going forward. The Issues Paper explores the main challenges, opportunities, and options for future policy, programmes, projects, and other actions.

The paper is intended to stimulate debate and discussion on Harborough District's economic priorities – on the district as an economic geography and set of communities; for HDC, major partners and stakeholders in the district's future; and specifically on the focus of the HDC Economic Development team.

Therefore, we invite you to read and consider this paper and let us know your views on the questions and issues it raises. HDC's EDS will be most effective if it is also your EDS – a compelling expression of your economic ambitions and priorities for Harborough District. Please get in touch and get involved...

**Background and context:** A huge amount has changed contextually since 2018 – globally and nationally as well as locally.



Considering the external context, major changes with some local economic implications, include:

- Much greater focus on both climate crisis and on inequalities and left-behind communities – epitomised nationally by, for instance, statutory net zero targets on environmental agendas, and ‘Levelling Up White Paper’ (LUWP) on lagging places and communities.
- Major advances in technology and the digital economy – including AI – likely to change the way most businesses and many people work and requiring new skills and competences.
- The UK has left the EU and global conflicts are increasingly disrupting global governance in general, and migration, trade, and investment in particular. Locally, the prominent roles EU Structural Funds had in local economic development has ended.
- The COVID-19 pandemic provided a huge post-2020 economic shock and transformed the way many people work and how we, key property and commercial markets regard physical space.
- The financial context is now characterised by cost of living and much higher costs than the 2010s, together with acute public finance constraints at both national and local levels.
- Devolution in England is gathering pace with pan-regional partnerships (PRPs) like Midlands Engine and Combined Authority proposals, among others, taking on Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) roles and functions.

Any of these singly require thoughtful consideration in determining Harborough District’s next EDS. Together, and alongside continuing rapid, volatile, and unpredictable changes, and an almost certain 2024 national general election, there must be a case for radical resetting rather than an incremental refresh.

The 2018-23 EDS’s vision was of a district with **“a robust reputation as a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and attractive place to do business. Sustainable employment opportunities and district-wide prosperity will be achieved by developing home-grown enterprises and proactively attracting high-value businesses to the area.”** It is a vision extremely focused on business growth within and inward investment to the district. Given the changes post-2018, is this the right emphasis for 2024-31?

**Q1. What are your thoughts on Harborough District’s opportunities and challenges of the late-2020s, and what would you like to see in the district’s overall vision?**

#### **Evidence review overview.**

A more detailed evidence review is appended at Annex One.

The key strategic issues relevant to the EDS might be summarised as:

1. **The basics** – geography and demography
  - a. Largest district spatially in Leicestershire & Leicester with second most sparse density
  - b. A tradition of rapid population growth that has slowed in recent years.
  - c. A rapidly aging population and potential working age population (WAP) shortages
  - d. Southernmost district with strong connectivity to London, South East, West Midlands
2. **Economic metrics** – Harborough District has a strong economic profile, with many economic indicators outperforming national, regional, and county averages.

- a. Resident WAP holds more senior jobs than average, with higher levels of qualifications and higher average earnings than the norms of local and regional geographies. Enterprise density within the district is strong, and unemployment is low. Economic activity rates and rates of economic activity growth are particularly high.
- b. However, GVA and productivity growth is sluggish, and gross disposable household income (GDHI) is extremely poor compared to neighbours and other comparators.
- c. High difference between residential and workplace earnings illustrates the importance of outward commuting. Although 2021 census figures are unreliable, out commuting (based on 2011 census) may be close to 50% of the WAP, although homeworking will have changed this during and post-pandemic.
- d. A strongly service-led economy, well-diversified within this, with a particular large and nationally important logistics sector anchored by Magna Park with most of the 'big beast' employers of the district.
- e. Digital infrastructure in the district is not as strong as some local and regional averages. The district tends to participate in Leicestershire's broadband investment and enabling programs rather than necessarily being at the forefront of them.

**3. Social and levelling up review** – despite seeming to have many positive economic metrics, Harborough District has significant vulnerabilities and risks in levelling up terms.

- a. Harborough District's GDHI relative fall over 20 years is by far the worst in L&L. It is an indicator of sluggish productivity and GVA growth and is only still above national averages because of out commuting to higher value jobs.
- b. Whilst the overall IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) ranking is very strong, the district has major health inequalities, acute housing affordability pressures and education and skill is a mixed bag with no local HE or FE at scale.
- c. There is an unexplained and surprising result in terms of survey trends measuring overall happiness that merits further investigation.

**4. Relevant environmental issues** – Harborough District seems well-positioned for a green-led EDS:

- a. The district's current CO2 emissions performance remains around average, but improvements are being made rapidly.
- b. Many parts of the district are well-established as aspirational locations for living, with a high quality of life and environment, and strong offers for active healthy living, access to open space, and nature recovery.

**5. Economic intelligence:** There are many relevant datasets – too many. And there can be challenges with all of them in terms of:

- a. level of geography (many do not even go down to district let alone sub-district level),
- b. timeliness (most official data is backward-looking – sometimes at quite extended periods in the past),
- c. significance (selecting which amongst so many metrics are of greatest priority).
- d. Besides the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), a couple of other composite indices which suggest ways of synthesising overall economic performance are explored in the Annex.

**Q2. Does the Evidence Review (including the annex) identify the major data sources relevant to the EDS? If not, what is omitted or interpreted inadequately?**



## Issues Paper

Based on the evidence review and contextual analysis, a SWOT (Strengths- Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats) matrix is used to synthesise the district’s performance in a high-level strategic tool for economic strategy planning and prioritisation.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affluent, high performing district with high quality of life and environment and considerable vitality in many important core economic metrics - skills, occupational employment, jobs and enterprise density, resident wages, and household income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typical non-metropolitan demographic challenges, major housing market pressures and tensions, lack of major business clusters anchored by global players and a well-defined innovation eco-system, and no HE or even FE footprint</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-located for Leicester, other East and West Midlands centres, with good connectivity to London and some regional airports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic strengths over-reliant on out-commuting and perhaps Magna Park. Local GVA, productivity and workplace wages are low and not growing particularly fast</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seemingly not as vulnerable to pandemic, impacts and other potential shocks as many places – with exceptionally low levels of multiple deprivation and strong health and wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not particularly well-placed to command policy attention and prioritisation from Government and LLEP compared to other L&amp;L flagship places and developments</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very well-positioned to take advantage of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life leveraging how well-connected it is to local cities and metropolitan centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National/regional context pays little attention to Harborough District and low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Magna Park and its existing consents could offer an opportunity for step-change and transformation in economic profile and performance of the campus and district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local complacency and resistance to change may inhibit ambition and necessary decisive, radical decision-making and delivery effectiveness</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market Harborough could create a new exemplary post-pandemic market town – together with reconfiguring attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued increasing demographic pressures and housing market challenges cause loss of dynamism and young talented exodus – leading to stagnation and decline</li> </ul>

The SWOT analysis highlights the district's high quality of life, environmental vitality, and positive economic metrics such as skills, occupational employment, jobs, and enterprise density. However, it also faces aging challenges, housing market pressures, lack of major business clusters, and no Higher Education or Further Education (HE or FE) footprint of any scale.

The district is well-located. But perhaps because of this, economic strengths are over-reliant on out-commuting and Magna Park. Locally produced GVA, productivity, and workplace wages are weak. Harborough District appears less vulnerable to potential shocks than many places, but not well-positioned to command policy attention and prioritisation from the government pan-regional and regional arrangement compared to other City and County (L&L) flagships and priorities.





The District is extremely well-placed to make the most of post-COVID premiums for space and quality of life. However, the national/regional context pays little attention to Harborough district, and low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity. Magna Park and its existing consents offers an opportunity for step-change in the campus and district's economic profile and performance. And there are other high profile niche businesses like Joules and some at Bruntingthorpe. Market Harborough could create a new exemplary post-pandemic market town, with Lutterworth, Broughton Astley, attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands enhancing the district's overall offer.

**Q3. Does the SWOT summarise Harborough District's key characteristics accurately? What is inaccurate, omitted and/or in need of qualification? What other issues would be most important if we expanded the table from three strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to four or five each?'**

The essence of an issues paper is that you use it to stimulate discussion on key issues. The choices that seem to arise from the evidence review and contextual analysis are outlined below:

1. First, the EDS consultation and co-creation process needs to discuss questions like:
  - **Q4. How should the overall economic health and performance of the district be measured, and what are the key indicators of success in this EDS?**
  - **Q5. In your opinion, "What does Harborough District wish to be known for as an economy in the future, and how ambitious should the 2024-31 strategy be in terms of the balance between incremental and step-change?**
2. Second, the Council needs to determine how far it wishes to build a "Team Harborough" approach of major partners, and how receptive partners are to this.
  - **Q6. Should there be some sort of refreshed Economic Growth Board or Panel (of HDC and other major economic role players locally) to take ownership of progressing and delivering the new strategy?**
3. Third, HDC needs to feel comfortable with a '**whole council**' approach to the EDS – with contributions from services like Planning, Property, Finance etc.; soft-power influencing by the leading Members and senior management; as well as a purposeful ED team.
4. Finally, **the ED team** needs to be structured and focused to deliver progress on the eventual agreed EDS approach and priorities.

Broadly, the options for the type of EDS are likely to be a mix of incremental and step-up/step change.

At one level, Harborough District could be a quiet, low-key partner, off-pitch of the main LLEP transformers (City, Airport/Gateway, Food Cluster, Professional & Business Services, Hinckley, Loughborough), and just slightly outside the major national Oxford2Cambridge Arc priority. It could focus on retaining its successful quality of life based on out commuting and older residents with reasonable incomes. It could live with Magna Park's expansion and focus on minimising its negative externalities. And that choice requires one type of economic strategy.

At another level, though, the district could want to be known nationally and even beyond as a modern vibrant district, welcoming talent, offering excellent and affordable quality of life and job opportunities, alongside ease of access to Leicester and major metropolitan centres. In this scenario:

- Market Harborough would be a nationally premier post-pandemic market town – maximising its connections to Leicester, Northamptonshire, and London
- Lutterworth, Broughton Astley and the Villages would progress town centre and neighbourhood plan where available to maximise their offer as high-quality residential communities and visitor economies.



- Magna Park (MP) will be the highest profile pacesetter (nationally) in net-zero logistics as a diversified campus with major innovation and education components.
- The enterprise and innovation focus beyond MP might seek to build on the quirky distinctive brands (like Joules, Bruntingthorpe), green and visitor economy opportunity.
- Major investment would be sought for affordable and market housing to attract and retain young talent.
- Digital investments would create step-change in home and hybrid working and even ‘digital nomad’ opportunities, whilst also improving local business competitiveness.

And those types of choices require a different type of strategy.

None of these choices are binary. The key to the 2024-31 strategy will be the judgements made as to how ambitious the district wishes to be, and where it wishes to position itself going forward in terms of these questions and the issues in the table below.

Strategic choices	Decision for the District	For HDC and ED Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should the EDS focus on orthodox GVA, productivity and local jobs, or give equal importance to out-commuters and quality of life?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orthodox EDS or</li> <li>• Triple bottom-line focus on economic wellbeing and green agendas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine what form “<b>Team Harborough</b>” arrangements should take – in terms of major institutions and partners involved in the future economic success of the district. Should there be some sort of Economic Growth Board or Panel?</li> <li>• Members and Senior Management to use <b>soft-power and influence</b> to advocate and gain support for the final formulation, approval, and delivery of the EDS.</li> <li>• Ensure there is a “<b>whole council ownership</b>” of the EDS and commitment to its delivery.</li> <li>• Refresh the roles, purposes, and priorities of <b>the ED team</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional EDS focus (business support, visitor economy, innovation, infrastructure, skills) or more value-driven</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise enterprise and innovation, skills and labour market, transport, and infrastructure or</li> <li>• Prioritise sustainability, inclusion, ‘good jobs’ and ‘good work’</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should strategy be incremental and manage existing trends well, or should it seek step-change to shift key trends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the most of rapid aging demographic and slowing population and economic growth rates or</li> <li>• Seek to attract and retain young talent and business</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even-handed between places or priority places for growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of attention and resource on market towns and villages</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision led with 2-3 big ticket changes or a longer shopping list of projects responding to funding opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on major projects (e.g. Magna Park, Market Harborough, higher level skills, digital infrastructure, and services)</li> <li>• Respond pragmatically as opportunities arise nationally, regionally, and locally</li> </ul>	

#### Q7. What do you see as the priorities of Harborough District Council as a whole and the HDC Economic Development Team in particular for economic development to 2031?

**Conclusions and next steps:** Your feedback on this paper will be welcomed and valued. Harborough District really is at a decisive moment when it needs to determine how radically and ambitiously to refresh its approach to economic development.

Following publication of this paper, we shall be holding interviews and discussions in February, March, and April with a view to formulating a draft full EDS in the Spring.



**Q8, Do you have further comments on the issues raised in this paper or on the process going forward? Are there any major considerations you believe we have omitted?**

Please respond to.....

### **Annex One: Evidence review.**

**Evidence Review I – sources used:** Harborough has a satisfactory level of evidence to undertake the Evidence Review and EDS formulation exercise. HDC publishes an [Economic Profile](#) on its website, dated 2018. This has been updated by the author from other sources. Among these are HDCs own [Local Plan and supporting evidence](#), Leicester & Leicestershire (LLEP) [Annual District Economic Profiles](#) and various other LLEP analyses, the [Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan](#) and a number of its supporting evidence documents including the [Housing and Economic Needs Assessment](#), and an extensive desk review of national datasets from, among others, Government and [ONS/NOMIS](#).

In summary, the existing evidence sources are sufficient to review Harborough's economic performance, the context and trends going forward, and key issues that should inform growth and development over the 2020s.

The author conducted and presented an extensive review of these sources in 2021/22, and a further analysis explicitly against the LUWP missions in 2022/23. These have been updated for 2023/24.

**Evidence Review II – The basics:** Harborough is the largest district spatially in the county and 27% of the entire LLEP area. Its population density at 161/sqkm is the second most sparse after Melton and is under one-third of average LLEP density. Despite this rurality, Market Harborough's built-up area comprises around ¼ of the district's population. With Lutterworth, Broughton Astley and the Leicester Fringe, this urban core rises to 50%.

Harborough's strong location on national road and rail transport routes to London makes it well-located, but intra-district travel, especially public transport, can be more problematic. Enabling the district to function as a systematic and synergistic set of towns and communities can be challenging.

Trend population growth is high but may be moderating. Over 2001-20, Harborough was the fastest growing district in Leicestershire, but in the 2010s, population growth fell below Charnwood. In 2015-20, North-west Leicestershire became the second district to overtake Harborough's growth rate. Going forward, forecasts suggest Harborough will cease to be a rapidly growing district within the county, similar to county averages to both 2033 and 2043. The aging demographic challenge is acute, with Harborough's current median age above national, regional, and county averages. The 70+ population rise of 11,700 by 2043 is greater than total 0-70 rise, taking over-70s to 22.6% of total population.

The district will increasingly experience a huge working age deficit and massive over-sixties surplus compared to national averages. With no HE or post-eighteen technical education provision at scale, Harborough suffers from a cliff edge exodus of talented young people at 18-19, many of whom will not return, and a significant above-average profile of over 60's and over 90s.

**Evidence Review III – economic profile:** Harborough has a strong economic profile, with core metrics outperforming national, regional, and county averages. The resident working-age population holds more senior jobs than average, with higher levels of qualifications and higher average earnings than the norms of their geographies. Enterprise density within the district is strong, and unemployment is low. Job density and job growth are reasonable yet unremarkable, but labour market participation is high. Harborough's 47,000 jobs represent a density of 0.84 of resident working-age population, above regional and county but below England averages.

[www.harborough.gov.uk](http://www.harborough.gov.uk)



On the labour supply side, economic activity rates and rates of growth are particularly high (87.8%) compared to national, regional, LEP, and county comparators. Unemployment doubled during the pandemic but remains low compared to national, regional, and county averages. Harborough is a self-employment hotspot, with 11.5% of economically active in 2021.

GVA and productivity growth have historically been modest, but Gross Disposable Household Income remains high. Harborough's productive base went into the pandemic with sluggish GVA and productivity performance. Its £2.2bn GVA economy grew by only 92% from 1999-2019, significantly below county, LEP, regional, and national averages. Gross Domestic Household Income (GDHI) remains strong at £24,246 per head, well above county, LEP, regional, and national averages.

The relatively high difference between residential and workplace earnings illustrates the importance of outward commuting. Resident average weekly earnings are well above national, regional, LEP, and county averages, while workplace earnings are below national rates, albeit slightly above regional and local averages. Harborough's connectivity enables residents to access higher value job opportunities regionally and even in London.

In the 2011 Census, Harborough's labour, and jobs markets self-contained at around 50%, with only 51% of 36,700 jobs filled by district residents. Of the districts' 42,300 workers, 55% commuted out of the district for work. This is unsurprising given Harborough's lack of a large city within the district and its proximity to Leicester, Northamptonshire, and metropolitan areas in the South and Midlands. The porousness of the labour market is significant strategically, as it is important to be aware of developments in Leicester and the city fringe, as well as North Northamptonshire and adjacent West Midlands area.

The 2021 census is highly problematic for self-containment analysis given the extraordinary levels of home working during the pandemic. However, the home working phenomenon is a major issue for strategic consideration in the EDS, potentially enabling Harborough to leverage its space assets and quality of life capabilities.

Harborough is a strongly service-led economy, well-diversified within this, with a particular large and nationally important logistics sector anchored by Magna Park. For local employment, Harborough has particularly high private enterprise densities (91% compared to under 83% nationally) with a reasonable spread of industries, and therefore commensurate low public sector employment. The only extremely high location quotients (LQs) are transportation and storage (3.3), recognising the importance of Magna Park. The lowest LQs are health and social work, finance, insurance, and other important industries going forward.

Active enterprises in Harborough represent a fair degree of diversification, with by and large enterprises by industry tending to mirror national patterns. However, Harborough's numbers of enterprises in transport and storage are lower than national averages, confirming the small number of 'big beasts' at Magna Park and relatively few businesses in the industry elsewhere. Agriculture has much larger footprints than national averages in both enterprise and employment.

Magna Park (MP) is the largest multi-site distribution centre in the UK, set on 550 acres and bounded by M1, M6, and M69 motorways. With consents for around 600,000 sq. meters to the north and south of the site, MP provides the largest component of Leicestershire's likely distribution and logistics expansion in the 2020s.

Harborough, a district with high business dynamism, has an unusual track record of business births and deaths. This suggests that the district may need investment to become better-placed for indigenous innovation, as it lacks university or research and technology organisations at scale. However, the potential for a logistics innovation centre, major private sector internationally competitive players, niche players, and specialist assets suggest potential for specialist Research, Development, and Innovation capabilities in the right post-pandemic circumstances.

[www.harborough.gov.uk](http://www.harborough.gov.uk)



Harborough businesses have utilised various government financial instruments, including 1671 awards for small business, retail, leisure, and hospitality concerns, 540 from Restart Funds, 210 grants from Local Authority Discretionary Grant Funds, and 116 from Additional Restrictions Support Grant, totalling at least £27m in support. The labour market saw a cumulative number of furlough Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme recipients and around 4,100 individuals taking up Self Employment Support Grant, making 13,800 claims with a value of £40,000,000.

Digital infrastructure in Harborough is not as strong as some local and regional averages, and the district has tended to participate in Leicestershire's broadband investment and enabling programs. The latest Think Broadband data shows 96.2% of premises with Superfast and 49.8% with Ultrafast connectivity, well below city and county performance.

**Evidence review IV** – Social and levelling up profile: However, Harborough's ranking is not entirely positive. The author's March 2022 Levelling Up analysis of district performance against the 10 LUWP missions showed concerns over major 'levelling-down' risks in Harborough's declining economic metrics, coupled with acute housing affordability and workplace pay inequality challenges, very high levels of out commuting, institutional capital deficits especially in higher and further education, and unexplained wellbeing metrics that deem to belie the high quality of life perceptions of the district.

Although, as stated above, many of Harborough's core economic metrics (e.g. economic participation, residential average wages, skills etc.) look relatively strong – especially compared to county and regional averages, this is almost entirely due to very high levels of out commuting – over 55% of residents in employment in the pre-pandemic era.

The local economy's performance, on the other hand is much weaker and has been characterised by declining relative productivity and gross domestic household income over time.

Harborough's productivity decline over 15 years prior to the pandemic is far more acute than its neighbours. Indeed the 10.5 index points fall is 2nd worst in Leicester and Leicestershire after Blaby and very different to its neighbours – Leicester, Melton and Hinckley & Bosworth who have RISEN 15, 16 and 17 points respectively.

The position is replicated with Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI). Harborough's GDHI 17.4% fall over 20 years is by far the worst, and even the 6.8% 2009-19 fall is only exceeded by Charnwood of the 9 L& councils. The point is that crude metrics may obscure this. Because of our commuting Harborough's overall GDHI remains the highest in L&L – at 113.1 (13% above UK averages). But it has fallen from 37% above average in 1999.

In terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Harborough ranks as one of the least deprived districts in England (10th/317), with none of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the 20% most deprived. However, despite its overall position, Harborough is not top-50 for either education or barriers to housing. Two of 47 LSOAs are in the 3rd and 4th deciles for deprivation, and it has the highest inequality gap between top and bottom in Leicestershire. In terms of public health, Harborough is considered positively in Public Health England pre-pandemic reports, with 20 green lights signifying well above regional averages. However, this will need to be kept under review for new conditions post-pandemic, notably long-COVID.

Harborough's education system is a mixed bag, with a lack of university or FE at scale increasing its reliance on neighbouring areas and depriving it of traditional anchor institutions. The profile of schools and sixth forms is also mixed, with some having performance concerns. The ONS happiness measures are increasingly being used to understand wellbeing, but Harborough tends to sit in the bottom half of UK districts and towards the bottom in Leicestershire for life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety measures.



Harborough's housing market is high price, with major affordability challenges. The median house price in November 2021 (£333,000) is the highest in Leicestershire, with increasing divergences from county and regional averages. The affordability ratios are also typically worse than national, regional, and county averages. The implications of this housing market for economic development and inequalities should be addressed in the strategy.

**Evidence review V** – Environmental profile: Harborough's current CO2 emissions performance remains around average, but improvements are being made rapidly. The district needs to consider whether and how to realise the potential for a green-led recovery, as the HDC declared a climate emergency in June 2019 and has developed a Climate Emergency Action Plan with commitments to deliver net zero for its own operations by 2030. Harborough's approach to green issues, particularly decarbonisation, should be a major driver of economic priorities and behaviour.

Harborough's emissions of 425.5 ktCO<sub>2</sub> represent a 30% reduction since 2005, with a per capita load of 4.5 ktCO<sub>2</sub> per resident. Transport is the highest generator of emissions, followed by domestic uses.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has produced a tool to estimate job requirements at the local authority level to achieve net zero by 2050. Harborough is well-positioned for other dimensions of green recovery, such as active healthy living, access to open space, and nature recovery. However, there is an issue with the size and scale of access to public green space. Harborough is well-established as an aspirational location for living, with a high quality of life and environment.

The Ordnance Survey access to open space database gives aggregate and average figures by local authority. Harborough has a property count of around 40,000, with only 10% being flats. The average size of outside space at 426m<sup>2</sup> is well above regional and national averages. However, Harborough has fewer and smaller public green spaces within 1000M of major residential settlements, well below county and regional averages.

**Evidence Review VI** – from evidence to intelligence: A final issue of merit for consideration in the eventual EDS concerns quality and timeliness of data. There are many relevant datasets – perhaps too many. And there can be challenges with all of them in terms of level of geography (many do not even go down to district let alone sub-district level), timeliness (most official data is backward-looking – sometimes at quite extended periods in the past), and significance (selecting which amongst so many metrics are of greatest priority).

There are a number of indices that could be used as part of an EDS tracking system, although not all of the economic vitality indices routinely go to district level.

Two were explored as part of this preliminary exercise:

The [UK Competitiveness Index](#) is a well-regarded index of economic competitiveness, the most recent edition of which is 2023. It benchmarks local authority geographies against ten economic indicators – inputs, outputs, and outcomes, all of which were considered in this evidence review.

The indicators are weighted to produce a single competitiveness score. The index is produced bi-annually and also models future potential for growth and development.

In the latest edition, Harborough District is ranked 141st of 362 UK local authorities. However, the overall score is only 95.8 (against a UK average of 100) and has dropped 3 points and 20 LA ranking places since 2019 – mirroring some of the concerns expressed earlier in the evidence review. The district is now ranked 6th in the East Midlands (from 5th in 2019) and is behind Blaby and North West Leicestershire in LLEP area – both of whose scores improved over the four years (with North West Leicestershire rising 3.6 points and 36 places over the four-year period).



The [Legatum Prosperity Index 2021](#) is more controversial; and does take an economic, social, and governance/institutional approach to measuring LA-level prosperity. Harborough District is ranked 26th of 379 LA areas in the 2021 index. However, this is mainly attributable to strong 'living conditions and health scores. The district scores quite poorly (bottom 30-40% for infrastructure and natural environment).

These types of indices are worth keeping in view for the questions they raise on the district's performance. But the EDS might wish to create its own bespoke index of the most important metrics it wishes to track for EDS purposes.





# Harborough District Council



## Report to Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting of 13 June 2024

<b>Title:</b>	Criteria for Community Grants to Parish and Town Councils
<b>Status:</b>	Report – Public
<b>Key Decision:</b>	n/a
<b>Report Author:</b>	Cat Hartley, Director of Communities & Wellbeing Rachael Felts, Head of Community Partnerships
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr Asher - Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure, Economy and Tourism
<b>Appendices:</b>	n/a

### Summary

- i. *At its meeting in February 2024, Council agreed to provide £1m in capital grant funding for parish and town councils.*
- 1.1. *The allocation of the grant will be split between towns, large villages, medium villages, villages close to urban settlements and small/smaller villages/hamlets.*

### Recommendations

- 1. To receive, consider and comment on the new £1m Parish and Town Council Capital Grant scheme criteria and the process for awarding the grants.

### Reasons for Recommendations

- ii. To provide Members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel with the details on Parishes and Town Council Grant Scheme which will be considered by Cabinet in July 2024.

# 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.2. To enable Members of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel to have an overview of the new £1m Capital Grant scheme for parishes and towns of the Harborough district before it is taken to Cabinet in July for approval.

# 2. Background

- 2.1. At its budget meeting in February 2024, Council agreed to provide a capital grant scheme of £1m for parish and town councils.
- 2.2. The new grant scheme will strengthen working relationships between the Council and its parishes and towns.
- 2.3. Through joint working with parishes and towns in the distribution of these grants it will enable delivery of projects and initiatives at a local level.
- 2.4. These grants will provide an opportunity for parish and town councils to support their communities in delivering community projects.
- 1.5 The Council has several grant/funding opportunities for businesses, organisations, and communities across the district to apply for funding these are:

Grant Name	Criteria	Funding available	Target Audience	Capital / Revenue	Spend date
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	Pre-determined projects to support to delivery of the Gov Grant by 2025	£3.7m	Businesses and communities	Capital	March 2025
Councillor/Ward Grants	To be determined	£170k	To be determined	Capital	
Environment Grant	Grants ranging from £5K to £20k and must have a positive and provable impact on the environment	£450k	Constituted 'not for profit' village/ community groups, community enterprises, registered charities, and town/parish councils	Capital	March 2027
S106 community facilities and offsite recreations	Contributions secured through planning obligations are used to mitigate or compensate for the negative impacts of a development.	£4.8m	Parish and Town Councils, Community Groups etc – where housing development has taken place	Capital	various
Harborough Lotto	Sign-up as a good cause. Identify your grant to be raised – promote the Lotto to your audiences	Various – currently 74 good causes	Community Groups, not for-profit organisations, Parish and Town Councils	Capital and Revenue	Various

## 3. Details

### 3.1 Proposed Criteria:

- Applications only to be accepted from Parish/Town Councils and Parish Meetings. In the case of Market Harborough, the ten Ward Councillors will consider applications and make recommendations through the Market Harborough Special Expenses Working Party before consideration at Cabinet Grants Sub-Committee.
- Applicants must hold a bank account in the name of the organisation and have at least three years of accounts.
- Community Groups can apply for funding through their Parish/Town Council or in the case of Market Harborough through the Market Harborough Special Expenses Working Party.
- Grant applications can be used to support other grant opportunities such as S106 'top-up'.
- More than one application can be submitted from each Parish or Town Council subject to it not exceeding the allocated grant amount for that Parish or Town.
- Grants must be spent within one year of receipt (unless agreement is given by HDC). Any non-spent money must be returned to the council.
- Applicants will need to demonstrate in no more than 500 words how their project meets/aligns to at least one the Council's Priorities:
  - Community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place.
  - Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices.
  - Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations.
  - Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.

3.2 A share of the £1m grant will be allocated to parishes and town councils. The allocation of grant expenditure is still to be determined.

3.3 **Grant Process** - The new Grant Administrators will be able to offer help and support in the completion of applications where there may be little knowledge or experience. The Grant Administrators will be responsible for administering the grant and ensuring all received applications are fully completed, meet the criteria and accompanying documents are provided.

3.4 A 'grants-window' will be opened for applications for a set period (e.g. two months). When the 'window' closes applications will be prepared into a report form and will be presented to Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants for decision. Once the Cabinet Sub-Committee has met, a new 'window' will be opened for new applications. Officers will align closing dates and meeting dates to enable an efficient process.

3.5 If the allocation is not spent after several grant rounds, any non-spent money may be combined to create a further grant opportunity. This will be considered by the Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants in due course.

## 4. Implications of Decisions

### Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This grant scheme will meet all four of the council's corporate priorities, these being:
- Community leadership to create a sense of pride in our place.
  - Promoting health and wellbeing and encouraging healthy life choices.

- Creating a sustainable environment to protect future generations.
- Supporting businesses and residents to deliver a prosperous local economy.

## **Consultation**

4.1 Consultation is not required in the preparation of this report, once agreed, the grant opportunity will be shared widely with parishes and town councils.

## **Financial**

4.2 At its meeting in February 2024, Council approved the £1m capital grant fund.

4.3 At the same meeting, Members also agreed £92,202 in 2024/25 and £95,429 in 2025/26 for grant administrator posts to support this grant and the Members grant fund.

## **Legal**

4.4 Each grant award made shall be governed by a Grant Agreement between the parties and shall contain the Proposed Criteria conditions listed at paragraph 3.1. Compliance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (the Act) shall be determined upon each grant award, and the Council shall consider whether the financial assistance is considered a subsidy, and therefore whether the requirements of the Act apply.

## **Environmental Implications**

4.5 There are no environmental implications relating to this report.

## **Risk Management**

4.6 Management of the grant process will be through the Council's Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants which terms of reference enable this committee to approve grants.

## **Equalities Impact**

4.7 There are no equalities impact relating to this report.

## **Data Protection**

4.8 All data collected as part of the grant application process will be handled in line with the Council's Data Sharing Policy, the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

## **5. Alternative Options Considered**

5.1 No other alternatives were considered as the grant will be available to towns and parish as agreed by Council in February 2024 and will align to the Council's priorities.

5.2 The grants approval process is already in place in the form of the Cabinet Sub-Committee Grants.

## **6. Recommendation**

3. To receive, consider and comment on the new £1m Parish and Town Council Capital Grant scheme criteria and the process for awarding the grants.

## **7. Background papers**

- 7.1 Council – February 2024



# Harborough District Council



## Report to: Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel Meeting of: 13<sup>th</sup> June 2024

<b>Title:</b>	The Future of Public Open Space Management Across the District
<b>Status:</b>	Public
<b>Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Report Author:</b>	Director for Planning, David Atkinson
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr Simon Galton: Planning, Environment and Waste
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix A - Estate Charges Rates Appendix B - Case Studies Appendix C - Corporate Policy Framework Considerations. Appendix D - Biodiversity Net Gain

### Summary

- i. To scrutinise potential alternative models for the management and maintenance of new Public Open Space across the district in the light of current models giving rise to some concerns across the community as to their effectiveness and value for money.



## Recommendations

**1. That Panel** consider an alternative approach to the provision of new public open space management and maintenance and make recommendations to be included in a future report to Cabinet.

**2. The Panel to discuss the following questions and any other questions before providing comments to Cabinet on this report:**

**i) Does Scrutiny have any suggested additional topic areas for inclusion in the scope of the review?**

**ii) Is the suggested hierarchy of maintenance responsibilities as outlined in para 2.7 of the report appropriate?**

**iii) Are the risks associated with the change in policy approach appropriate? Have any risks been overlooked?**

**3. The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked comment on this report and its appendices.**

## Reason for Recommendations

To scrutinise the current policy approach to the maintenance and management of new public open spaces across the district and to consider a new approach to improve resident satisfaction.

### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. To consider whether changes need to be made to the adoption, maintenance and management of new public open space across the district.

### 2. Background

2.1 Since 2013 new public open space in Harborough District has predominantly been adopted and managed by Management Companies (ManCos) appointed by developers.

2.2 The performance of ManCos has been inconsistent. Some ManCos have performed well and present no issues to residents, whilst others, in combination with poor developer performance, have created issues for residents which are difficult to resolve through enforcement or legal action.

- 2.3 This is frustrating for residents, officers and elected members as time is spent trying to resolve issues, often without any mechanism to enforce landscape plans or landscape management plans.
- 2.4 Public open space is highly valued by communities and provides opportunities for formal and informal recreation as well as a haven for biodiversity.
- 2.5 Public open space, when handed to a ManCo, is maintained with funds collected directly from residents of the new development. This can lead to ‘double charging’ of residents who are already paying their Council Tax being charged additionally for maintenance of their open spaces. These open spaces must also be accessible by any resident and is not for the sole use of ManCo service charge contributors. Examples of Estate Charges for open space can be found at Appendix A.
- 2.6 There are a number of Case Studies regarding adoption of public open space in the district. Details can be found at Appendix B.
- 2.7 Scrutiny is asked to scrutinise whether the current arrangements for the management and maintenance of new public open space should be amended to be, in the first instance, parish or town councils; secondly the district council if the town or parish are not able to, or do not wish to take an open space area for some reason, or if the open space is of greater than local significance. The final choice would be an arm’s length Management Company (ManCo).
- 2.8 Under this new arrangement, it is expected that the parish or town council would fund open space management from a commuted sum paid by the developer for 15 years on transfer of the open space. The parish or town council concerned would build in time build a charge for continued onward maintenance into the parish precept, and thereby pay for onward maintenance through council tax.
- 2.9 If the town or parish council did not want to maintain open space of local significance, or did not have the wherewithal to do so, then the district council could step in to undertake the maintenance. In this scenario, the district council would take receipt of the 15-year commuted maintenance sum from the developer. When the 15-year maintenance period expired, the Council would build in an ongoing charge to residents through the Special Expense Area funding framework and thus fund new public open space maintenance through council tax.
- 2.10 The above (para 2.7 to 2.9) is subject to whether developers can be compelled to pay a commuted sum for maintenance and is reliant on the council’s policy framework being suitably amended, (see para 3.3 below).
- 2.11 Scrutiny is asked to consider reviewing the corporate policy framework for this area of operation to enable a greater emphasis on public authorities, in the form of town and parish councils and the district council, in managing and maintaining public open space across the district. Do scrutiny consider this new approach would lead to greater service transparency and resilience.

### 3. Details

- 3.1 A review of the policy framework for managing new public open space across the district is being considered and it is important Scrutiny Panel consider this. These new open spaces often arise associated with new development through S106 obligations. There can be a commuted sum associated with them also through the S106 to support their maintenance for a pre-determined period of years.
- 3.2 The corporate policy framework approach to managing new public open spaces coming forward is linked to the delivery of development and associated open space across the district.
- 3.3 To give effect to this sort of change there would be a need to consider changing the council policy framework for the management and maintenance of new public open space coming forward. This policy framework is mainly enshrined in the following documents:
- The Open Spaces Strategy document. This document is adopted as a formal policy document by Council.
  - The Protocol for the Delivery of New Public Open Space, 2023 (adopted January 2023).
  - The Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation – Delivery Plan 2021.
  - The Corporate Property Strategy, Supplementary Policy and Procedures Disposal & Acquisition Procedure (which provides a mechanism for adoption of open space).
  - Appendix C, Section 5: Adoption of Public Space of the Corporate Property Strategy (which outlines the criteria under which HDC will adopt Public Open Space).

#### *Proposed Scope of the Corporate Policy Framework Review*

- 3.4 The main areas to consider concerning this review are set out between paragraphs 3.5 and 3.13 below.
- 3.5 There will likely to be the need to explore how a changed policy approach will be funded, potentially through a combination of commuted sums from the developer, Parish Precept and/or District Council Special Expenses funding for open space of local significance and any that is of more than local significance.
- 3.6 There will also, likely to be the need to revisit developments currently in the pipeline that perhaps have planning permission but are not yet built out. Potentially seek to renegotiate and vary the S106 obligations linked to those developments to change the approach to the management and maintenance of public open space from a management company basis to the alternative approach outlined in this report.

- 3.7 It may also be necessary to ensure that any new policy approach to the management and maintenance of public open space is applied in every site case moving forward.
- 3.8 It may also be necessary to make clear to all that changing this approach, should it be agreed, will not be a quick process. It could take 5 – 10 years for sites currently going through the development process to complete and for the new policy approach to be applied to open space delivery moving forward. This will especially be the case where attempts to renegotiate and vary S106 obligations on existing sites are not successful.
- 3.9 There will also be a need to consider our approach to consultation with communities, Town and Parish Councils, developer partners and other similar stakeholders, on any proposed policy and/or governance changes, including the media we choose to access our audiences. A second aspect of this relates to how it is communicated to Town and Parish Councils and how they perceive it. Ideally, they need to see this as an opportunity and not as an additional burden. This will ensure they are more likely to see the change positively.
- 3.10 It is also likely to be important to consider the role that Biodiversity Net Gain, and links to Local Nature Recovery Strategies, as they emerge, may play in helping to sustain any new policy/governance approach adopted.
- 3.11 It will be likely to be necessary to ensure that we maintain flexibility around the sites maintained, and not to succumb to ‘one size fits all’, to ensure we maintain positive behaviours from developers in terms of them, for example, not holding either parish, town or district council to ransom around open space maintenance.
- 3.12 It will also be important to consider establishing likely timelines to when the changes can be given effect to, perhaps via a phased delivery approach. This would need to relate to both changing the delivery and maintenance approach concerning sites already benefitting from planning permission and changing the policy and governance background for sites coming forward in future through the changed policy framework.
- 3.13 Consider the financial dimension of this work for the district council
- 3.14 Each of the areas briefly set out above is considered in more detail in Appendix C to this report.

## 4. Implications of Decisions

### Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 Review of the adoption, maintenance and management responsibilities of open space across the district will assist the delivery of the following corporate priorities.
- CO3: The rural nature of the district will be recognised, and our heritage and cultural assets are preserved.

- CO4: Our local communities, the voluntary and charitable sector are more engaged and actively managing their own localities and shaping their own places.
- CO5: The district will be shaped through good design, that addresses local needs and promotes healthier life choices.

## **Consultation**

- 4.2 Consultation took place for the preparation of the Open Spaces Strategy (adopted in 2021) with residents, Parish Councils, officers, other stakeholders and developers. Further consultation was undertaken with 4 resident groups to consider amongst other issues the adoption of open space from developers by the Council.
- 4.3 It is proposed that a similar level of consultation would be undertaken during the review of this element of the Open Spaces Strategy, should this work be taken forward, with particular emphasis on Parish Councils, developers and representative resident groups.

## **Financial**

- 4.4 Financial resources would be required to undertake the consultation and preparation of the new Open Spaces Strategy and Corporate Property Strategy. The preparation of the strategy approach will need to be considered against all equality implications.
- 4.5 There would be additional costs associated with maintenance of new open spaces adopted by either Parish Council or District Council. It is intended that these costs are covered by additional charges through the parish precept or Special Expenses budgets on an area basis.
- 4.6 There will be additional costs associated with the renegotiation of S106 agreements. These costs will include officer time and legal expenses for both the council and other signatories to the S106 agreements.

## **Legal**

- 4.7 Legal Services will advise whether developers can be compelled to transfer open space to either Parish Councils or District Councils.
- 4.8 Legal Services will be required to undertake the negotiations for variations of existing S106 agreements should that be feasible. Any new S106 agreements will need to be negotiated in accordance with the updated policy and strategy approach to adoption of open space.

## **Environmental Implications**

- 4.9 Changes to the approach towards adoption of open space is unlikely to have detrimental effects on the environment.
- 4.10 There is a possibility that positive environmental effects could be achieved through sites being more proactively managed for biodiversity by responsible authorities, and through opportunities that might be realised for Biodiversity Net Gain.

4.11 More details concerning Biodiversity Net Gain can be found at Appendix D.

### **Risk Management**

4.12 The risks associated with the change in approach to adoption of open space can be mitigated by:

- Ensuring the open spaces strategy plan remains up to date and delivers what communities want.
- Ensuring that the reputational risk to the Council has been considered.
- Provision of certainty to key stakeholders, including developers, local authority partners, communities and site promoters, enabling effective delivery of public open space.
- Ensures compliance with the NPPF, guidance and recommendation for provision of open space.

### **Equalities Impact**

4.13 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) for the updated open space strategy will be prepared and regularly reviewed as part of the Open Spaces Strategy review.

### **Data Protection**

4.14 All consultations on the Open Spaces Strategy and review of the adoption, maintenance and management of open space will be carried out in compliance with the provisions of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

## **5. Alternative Options Considered**

- 5.1 **Do Nothing** – this is not considered appropriate. The number of complaints concerning management and maintenance of open space is rising since the policy approach of the Council was changed in 2013 and ManCos became the primary source of maintenance of new open spaces. The number of communities that are adversely affected by the current approach of the Council to not adopt open space is likely to rise in the future. This is a reputational risk to the Council which needs to be taken seriously.
- 5.2 **District Council to adopt all open space** – this is not preferred as the Management of local facilities at a local level by a parish or town council is considered to be the best approach for communities. Responsible bodies are accessible to communities and when and if things go wrong, they can be easily contacted. Decisions concerning improvements or changes of use of open space can also be made locally for the benefit of communities.
- 5.3 The costs to the District Council of adopting and managing all new open space would be recharged to parish taxpayers via Special Expenses.

## **6. Recommendations**

1. **That Panel consider an alternative approach to the provision of new public open space management and maintenance and make recommendations to be included in a future report to Cabinet.**

2. The Panel to discuss the following questions and any other questions before providing comments to Cabinet on this report:

- Does Scrutiny have any suggested additional topic areas for inclusion in the scope of the review?
- Is the suggested hierarchy of maintenance responsibilities as outlined in para 2.7 of the report appropriate?
- Are the risks associated with the change in policy approach appropriate? Have any risks been overlooked?

3. The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel is asked comment on this report and its appendices.

## 7. Background papers

- [Open Spaces Strategy 2021](#)
- [Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation – Delivery Plan 2021](#)
- [Protocol for the Delivery of New Open Spaces 2023](#)



## Appendix A – Estate Charges rates

Table 1 below sets out a number of charges from around the country

**Table 1**

Location	Developer	Landscape Management Company	Charge/annum	No of properties
Broughton Chase, Broughton Astley	Lagan	FirstPort	£200	50
Bromsgrove, Worcester	Bovis	SDL	£400	
Great Broughton, Cumbria	Persimmon	Gateway	£125	58
York Dale, Barton Seagave	Taylor Wimpey	FirstPort	£360	448
Yeoman Chase, Worthing	Bloor	Trinity	£300	48
Woodside Kippax, Leeds	Persimmon	Kippax Man Co	£130	110
Wychbury Lawns, Hagley	Cala Homes	Remus	£236	53
Windmill Meadow, Branston	Taylor Wimpey	Encore	£193	213
Windsor Gate	Bellway	Healey Gate	£400	263
The Pastures, Alcester	Redrow	Betts Ecology	£218	119
St Nicholas Mews, Basildon	Redrow	Trinity	£350	133
Ote Park, Burgess Hill	Bloor	Trinity	£228	160
The Acres	Bovis	Gateway	£300	700
Waterford Place, Eltham	Linden	First Port	£600	135
The Sutherlands, Telford	Miller	SDL	£182	68
The Spires, Lichfield	Taylor Wimpey	The Spires Man Co	£500	31
St Francis Park, Haywards Heath	Crest Nicholson	HML	£250	92
Average Charge per annum			£292.47	

**Average charge = £292.47**

A comprehensive list of estate charges for open space maintenance across the country can be found [here](#).



## Appendix B – Case Studies

- 1.1.1. The open space serving the **Hursley Park** residential site north of Great Bowden is currently managed by a Residents Management Company. Significant challenges have been faced by residents of the new development in ensuring that contractors appointed to manage the open space undertake that work to a good standard. Challenges included; failing landscaping, missing fencing and hedging, poorly constructed pathways. Significant officer time was spent rectifying as many issues encountered as possible to support the residents and to ensure the best possible outcomes. It is the opinion of some residents that the issues were never fully resolved to their satisfaction prior to them taking over the maintenance of the open space. The biggest issue for residents is the pathways which they allege are not up to the appropriate technical standard of construction. Significant time was applied by the Planning Director, Planning Enforcement team and the Council's Green Spaces officer to get the best result possible for the residents. This represents expenditure by the Council that should not have been necessary.
- 1.1.2. The site at **Broughton Chase**, Broughton Astley, has been the subject of complaints from residents around the non-completion of public open space by the developer. Also, residents have expressed concerns about installation of landscape features around the site that do not appear to be in accordance with approved plans and layouts. Fences on the site are not in a condition that can be signed off and footpaths have been left incomplete. This is now leading to planning enforcement resources and other officer resources being used to hold the developer to their commitments as per the approved plans.
- 1.1.3. The **Farndon Fields** site on the south - western edge of Market Harborough has been the subject of complaints from residents concerning public open space non-compliance with approved plans and Section 106 obligations, agreements and commitments. This has led to significant Planning Enforcement and Legal Services time commitments to pursue different developers to ensure they deliver what they are committed to in approved plans and legal agreements.
- 1.1.4. The **Ashton Rise** site adjacent to Lubenham Hill in Market Harborough has seen residents' complaints around the standard of maintenance delivered by the responsible management company. The open space has been successfully delivered on this occasion however the challenges have arisen linked to subsequent maintenance. This is a variation on the themes established in the first three case studies above, in that it is post-delivery maintenance that seems to have fallen short of expected standards from the management company. Residents have also complained about the non-adoption of their open space by the Council despite committing to a management fee in order to maintain the open space.
- 1.1.5. The site at **Kimcote Road**, Gilmorton has been the subject of residents making long-standing complaints about the condition of the Public Open Space on the site and particularly linked to the condition and maintenance of the site play area. Play equipment has not been adequately maintained either in terms of a timely approach to repairs/fresh installations or the repairs failing to be undertaken to the required standard.
- 1.2. The next three case studies are those where the Council is obliged to adopt open space, but the developer has not satisfactorily completed the site.

## Appendix B – Case Studies

- 1.2.1. **Stretton Road**, Great Glen has not been adopted by the Council because of flooding issues over a number of years. A number of properties were flooded, and the developer has sought to find a solution satisfactory to HDC engineers and the Lead Local Flood Authority. Whilst a solution may have been found the on-site landscaping is now in a poor condition and not up to adoptable standard. HDC will be obliged to adopt the open space once it is up to adoptable standard.
  - 1.2.2. **Blackberry Grange**, Market Harborough has been the subject of resident concerns since 2016. The Council has not adopted the open space because of poor quality implementation and poor-quality maintenance. The issue has been raised through enforcement and directly with the developer. HDC are obliged to adopt this open space once it is up to adoptable standard.
  - 1.2.3. **David Hobbs Rise**, Market Harborough has been the subject of a developer enquiry for the District Council to adopt the open space. There are issues with poor quality play area, drainage installed without permission in order to prevent field run off reaching properties, poor quality maintenance and access gates installed without permission. The Council has yet to receive assurance from the developer that these issues can be overcome.
- 1.3. There are numerous sites across the district that have been successfully completed, or being completed, by developers, transferred to a Management Company or Parish Council and are being satisfactorily maintained. These include, since 2020:
1. **Main St, Lubenham** 15/01471/OUT – visit Jan 2020 – for issue of practical completion certificate by Development Management. Developer maintained.
  2. **Warwick Road POS, Kibworths** 04/00319/OUT – visit June 2020 – POS adopted by HDC, Play Area by KHPC with commuted sum in 2020.
  3. **The Green, Ullesthorpe** 14/01684/REM - visit Jul 2020 - adopted by ManCo.
  4. **Strawberry Fields POS**, Scraftoft 11/00895/OUT – visit Jul 2020 – adopted by Scraftoft PC with commuted sum.
  5. **Pulford Drive Thurnby** – 11/01080/OUT - visit Nov 2020 with PC. – Adopted by Thurnby and Bushby Parish Council with a commuted sum for maintenance and maintained by HDC on behalf of the PC.
  6. **Coventry Road POS, Broughton Astley** 13/00898/FUL – visit Dec 2020 – developer maintained to be adopted by ManCo.
  7. **Main St, Lubenham** 15/01471/OUT – visit Jan 2021 – for issue of final certificate by Development Management. ManCo maintained.
  8. **Main Street, Claybrooke Magna** 17/00593/FUL – visit Aug 2021 - adopted by ManCo.
  9. **Ashby Road POS, Ullesthorpe** 18/00534/REM visit Aug 2021 – developer maintained.
  10. **Coventry Road POS, Broughton Astley** 13/00898/FUL – visit Aug 2021 – to be adopted by ManCo. Certificate not yet issued.
  11. **Leicester Road Lutterworth** 14/00739/OUT - visit Sept 2021 - adopted by ManCo.

## Appendix B – Case Studies

12. **Ashby Road POS, Ullesthorpe** 16/00373/OUT - visit May 2022 - developer maintained to be adopted by ManCo.
13. **Centurion Place POS, Kibworths** 15/01510/REM – visit April 2022 – completion certificate - developer maintained - to be adopted by ManCo.
14. **North End Hallaton**. 18/01266/FUL – visit Oct 2022 – completion cert – developer maintained.
15. **North End Hallaton** 18/01266/FUL – visit Sept 2023 – Final Certificate issued - adopted by ManCo.
16. **Oaks Road POS, Great Glen** 17/00579/OUT - visit March 2024 – developer maintained – incomplete. Advisory visit with developer. To be maintained by ManCo.



## **Appendix C – Corporate Policy Framework considerations**

### **A. Council New Public Open Space Policy**

- 1.1. The council's current open space policy framework is set out in the Council's Open Spaces Strategy policy document adopted in December 2021. Normally this document is reviewed in five-year periods, so it would be coming up for a review in 2026.
- 1.2. This Open Spaces Strategy is in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) for Open Space, which have replaced Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation (2002) and its companion guide, Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A companion guide to Planning Policy Guidance 17 (2002).
- 1.3. The current policy document called: "Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation – Delivery Plan 2021" states that new public open space provided on development sites should be maintained by the developer to the satisfaction of the District Council for a period of 12 months after practical completion. Upon the expiry of this 12-month maintenance period, the open space shall be transferred to either the Council or nominated maintenance organisation following the payment of a commuted sum as required. The space will be required to be to the standards outlined in the document.
- 1.4. The specified commuted sum period is currently set at 30-years, with applicants entering into a S106 Agreement with the Council.
- 1.5. Currently the policy presents three options for the maintenance of the open space unless it is of more than local significance. These are, in the following order:
  - Transfer to a Management Company;
  - Transfer to the District Council;
  - Transfer to a Town or Parish Council.
- 1.6. There is an interest in changing this policy framework to having Town and Parish Councils as the first tranche of organisation to take receipt of new open spaces for maintenance accompanied by a commuted sum through S106 agreement. The District Council would be the second choice to take receipt of new open space and the final choice of organisation to maintain the new open spaces would be a management company or 'Man Co'.
- 1.7. There will be a need to review the 2021 adopted Open Space Strategy and the supporting document Provision for Open Spaces Sport and Recreation – Delivery Plan to give effect to such changes.

### **B. Funding Open Space Maintenance**

## **Appendix C – Corporate Policy Framework considerations**

- 1.8. It is proposed to modify the funding mechanism that supports the maintenance of new public open spaces. It is proposed that commuted sums remain an important component to the funding package, however, it has been found that the current 30-year commuted sum requested tends to be off-putting to developers who feel the charges are excessive and present viability issues.
- 1.9. It is proposed to revert to a commuted sum maintenance period of 15 years following the 1-year maintenance period which is the responsibility of the developer post practical completion of the open space.
- 1.10. It is unlikely that developers can be compelled to transfer public open space to the Council with the associated commuted sum but experience prior to 2015 indicates that most are willing to consider this option.
- 1.11. Following the 15-year period, if the open space was to be maintained by a parish or town council, it is proposed that the respective authority would build a parish precept into their council tax funding framework, if they were content to maintain the open space concerned. This approach will ensure that the local community directly contributes to funding the maintenance of new public open space provided for the benefit of that community.
- 1.12. The parish Precept can be set locally by parish or town council concerned to support the maintenance of local infrastructure of which public open spaces are part. If they were not comfortable to maintain the open space, the district council would build a charge into the relevant Special Expense Area council tax funding framework to continue the maintenance of the open space concerned.

### **C. Seeking to Renegotiate Existing S106 Agreements**

- 1.13. Should the need to change the policy approach be agreed, it will be desirable to create as much momentum as quickly as possible for the change. Part of the implementation of it will include seeking to renegotiate existing S106 Agreements. Variations to legal S106 Agreements must be agreed by the developer party with whom the agreement is with and any other signatories relating to the matter under consideration. In the light of this scenario, it is not possible to predict whether the renegotiation of an individual S106 would be an easy or a challenging process or even be possible.
- 1.14. For any change to Public Open Space maintenance and management policy to achieve early outputs it will be necessary and appropriate to seek to renegotiate some existing agreements to translate them into agreements that meet new policy approaches and requirements.

### **D. Applying a New Policy Consistently Across New Open Space Sites**



## Appendix C – Corporate Policy Framework considerations

- 1.15. Any new policy approach will need to be consistently applied across all sites that come forward from the adoption of the new policy approach. This will particularly apply following the adoption of the new local plan from 2026 when a number of new sub-strategic and strategic sites will be delivered with associated new public open spaces. There may also be a limited number of such sites that come forward on a 'windfall' basis between now and the adoption of the plan to which the changed policy approach would apply.
- 1.16. It will be important to consult with developer partners and other stakeholders in relation to any proposed policy change in this area.

### **E. It may take a time for a policy change to take effect**

- 1.17. In light of the considerable amount of time it takes to vary S106 agreements, and the complex legal negotiations that are required, it will take some time to give effect to a changed policy approach relating to existing planning permissions.
- 1.18. It will be important to ensure any time delays are kept to a minimum and for this to be the case a robust and resilient planning legal resource will be needed to progress this work. There are likely to be a number of complex S106 agreements that will need to be renegotiated and varied with the agreement of the developer parties.
- 1.19. Similarly, a realistic work programme will need to be drawn up to progress the work required to progress the review of the public open spaces policy framework. This will need to include seeking member approval to progress this work through informal briefing and Cabinet, carrying out the technical work required, and consulting on the proposed new policy approach with communities, developers and other stakeholders.
- 1.20. A full work programme will need to be drawn up and a robust project management approach taken to effectively manage all work streams involved.

### **F. Approach to consultation and communications**

- 1.21. It will be necessary to draw up and approve a comprehensive consultation, engagement and communications plan covering how we communicate with:
  - Town, Parish Councils and Parish Meetings,
  - Other appropriately constituted groups who may wish to manage areas of open space,
  - The wider community as needed,
  - Professional stakeholders such as developers and site promoters,

## Appendix C – Corporate Policy Framework considerations

- All relevant stakeholders across the council involved in this area of operation, including green space maintenance services, legal and financial services, community services and others,
- The County Council's Ecology Services – especially linked to potential Biodiversity Net Gain opportunities etc.,
- The wildlife trust and other green stakeholders – again linked to rewilding and BNG and LNRS opportunities,
- Other identified stakeholders as required.

1.22. Project leaders will need to coordinate consultation, engagement and communications arrangements with the Council's communications team to enable a comprehensive approach.

### **G. The Potential Role of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

1.23. There is a potential role for BNG associated with a new policy approach to the management and maintenance of Open Space. Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development that leave biodiversity in a better state after development and before. It places a legal requirement on developers to provide an increase in appropriate natural habitat over and above that being affected by development.

1.24. There is significant work involved in following the legal requirements to establishing land as being suitable for BNG and the Council would need to carefully consider the resourcing requirements involved in pursuing a proactive approach to using open space in this way. Additional resources are likely to be required to enable this work. There are benefits in that income can be derived from the BNG credits system, but quite significant technical work would need to be done up front.

### **H. The Involvement of Elected Members**

1.25. There will be a need to comprehensively involve elected members concerning the proposals set out in this report to establish if they support making the proposed changes to process. Scrutiny Panel have an opportunity tonight to consider the issues prior to preparing a Cabinet report for a formal decision to make the policy and other changes required. Following this an all-member briefing could be useful to share the new approach and the rationale for it with remaining council members. There will then be a need to keep members close to the technical, consultation, engagement and other work during the processes involved to implement the changes.

### **I. Maintaining a Flexibility of Approach**

## **Appendix C – Corporate Policy Framework considerations**

- 1.26. It will be important to maintain an agile approach to new open space site delivery, adoption and maintenance in the lead up to, during and post any changes that are implemented.
- 1.27. It will need to be ensured that a 'one size fits all' approach is avoided. The new policy position, if members approve it, will need to be implemented with a degree of case specific intelligence behind it. For example, it may not always be possible to give effect to the first new policy preference and we may need to turn to a different solution on a site-specific basis.
- 1.28. It will also be necessary to adopt this approach so that we ensure that we maintain positive and 'can do' behaviours from our developer partners. For example, it will be important that developer partners do not hold a council receiving new open space 'to ransom'. For example, when developers hand over new open space to Parish/Town Councils for ongoing maintenance, ensuring they do not refuse to provide a commuted sum for 15 years to contribute to site maintenance.

### **J. Developing a Project/Programme Management Timetable**

- 1.29. As with all work of this nature, it will be necessary to develop a clear project/programme management timetable to guide delivery of this work. This will need to include all of the inter and co-dependencies and ensure a 'one council' approach to this work. There will be a need for a project/programme type change management board.
- 1.30. Corporately this work is seen as a piece of business-as-usual work and not a project because it is work the council is already does. Whatever the scale of the work turns out to be, it will need to be governed using the Councils up to date project and programme management framework.
- 1.31. Detailed decisions around this governance will need to be made in the lead up to a member decision being made to proceed with this open space policy review work.

### **K. Considering the financial aspect of this work for the District Council**

- 1.32. It will clearly be necessary to factor in financial considerations to this work. This may result in increased revenue expenditure for the council. There will be a need to carefully consider the use of Special Expenses Area funding, and potentially effects on the District Council's general fund for open space sites that serve a more than local function, like, for example, Welland Park in Market Harborough. There will need to be a detailed analysis of how any new policy is to be funded moving forward. It will be necessary to work closely with the finance team on this.

## **Appendix C – Corporate Policy Framework considerations**

## Appendix D – Biodiversity Net gain

### Background

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to new development, but also land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than before.

In these uncertain times we know that landowners, landholders and managers are scanning the horizon to make decisions on how best to manage landholdings or estates and explore alternative sources of income. BNG is one way that land can be managed to better our natural environment and generate an income from doing so. Whether on a large estate, a smaller piece of land or a network of sites across the country, BNG provides an opportunity to enter a market where 'biodiversity units' are bought and sold with the aim of delivering outcomes for nature that can also support economic growth.

### How BNG works

Commencing in late 2023, most developments in England will need to achieve a minimum 10% net gain in order for their development to receive planning permission. They will use the [biodiversity metric](#), expected to be version 4.0, to calculate how many biodiversity units they need, in order to achieve this. When they cannot fully deliver BNG on site, they can deliver gains off site.

The new off-site market in biodiversity units is where landowners (of any type, including local authorities) are involved. Creating or enhancing habitats on your land generates these biodiversity units which you can, in turn, sell to developers. The market represents a potential chance to diversify your income. Indeed, it is expected to be worth £135m - £274m annually.

Further guidance is still anticipated on how BNG will operate, and Natural England will continue to support government in its development. To help kick-start this activity, Defra has put together some advice to support anyone looking to sell biodiversity units: [Sell biodiversity units as a land manager](#).

If landowners are considering delivering habitats for biodiversity net gain, then they are encouraged to think about the actions that can be done now. For example, habitats created or improved in advance of sale generate more 'biodiversity units', therefore starting habitat works early could benefit landowners longer term. If landowners are not yet in a position to start creating or enhancing habitats, then there are still things that can be done. This might be starting to establish baselines land that they own, using the Biodiversity Metric to explore the possibilities and what might be appropriate.

