

**CABINET – 21 JULY 2026****HARBOROUGH DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN****SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF GROWTH,
ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the progress of Harborough District Council's (HDC) Local Plan and to seek appropriate delegations for the County Council to work with HDC as required by the Inspectors ahead of the Examination in Public (EiP) and the initial hearing session, which is scheduled for 12 August 2026.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended that:
 - a) The proposed timetable for the progression of the HDC Local Plan is noted;
 - b) The Director of Growth, Environment and Transport, following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Lead Members, be authorised to work with HDC in preparing for the Plan's EiP, to demonstrate effective and on-going joint working. This includes:
 - i. To work through issues to seek to reach a satisfactory resolution to the County Council's transport concerns expressed in its Regulation 19 consultation response; and
 - ii. To work with HDC with a view to signing an appropriate SoCG on transport matters between HDC and the County Council as the Local Transport Authority (LTA), in accordance with the timeframe of 14 August 2026 set by the Plan's examining Inspectors. The SoCG would need to include areas of disagreement where there remain unresolved concerns.
 - c) It be noted that, in the event that the County Council's transport concerns cannot be satisfactorily resolved and/or it is not possible to reach agreement on a suitable and appropriate SoCG, this could pose a material risk to the continuation of the Plan through its EiP.

- d) The Director of Growth, Environment and Transport be authorised where necessary to write to the Plan's Inspectors to update them on the County Council's position.

Reasons for Recommendation

- 3. The County Council continues to seek to influence the content of the Local Plan in the interests of local communities, including ensuring that the Local Plan provides an as robust as possible policy platform for securing the provision of the infrastructure and services that are required to supports its successful delivery.
- 4. Independent Planning Inspectors who have been appointed by the Secretary of State to conduct an independent examination into the soundness and legal compliance of the submitted local plan, have requested that HDC and the County Council work together to ensure that the SoCG is agreed and signed to meet a deadline of 14 August 2026.
- 5. On 25 March 2026, new regulations came into force, which meant that the Duty to Co-operate would no longer apply to new, or emerging Local Plans. Notwithstanding this change, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024) still requires "maintaining effective co-operation" across administrative boundaries (as explained in paragraph 33 of this report). Inspectors are expected to continue to examine plans in line with these policies.
- 6. Transport is a significant matter in respect of this Plan. It is important that the Cabinet makes its decisions understanding the potential risks involved.
- 7. Given the significance of these transport matters, it may be necessary to update the Inspectors of the Plan on the County Council's position as the Examination progresses.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

- 8. HDC formally submitted the Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041 to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 17 April 2026. An initial hearing session is due to take place on 12 August 2026, with further sessions due to take place between 9 and 30 November 2026.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

- 9. In 2018, the County Council, Leicester City Council, the seven district councils in Leicestershire, and the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP), approved the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) which provides the long-term vision for planned growth for the area up to 2050. Both Market Harborough and Lutterworth are identified as being areas for managed growth in local plans.
- 10. The Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities (LLTSTP) was approved by the Cabinet on 20 November 2020. This document has a plan

period to 2050, and it was developed by the County Council and City Council alongside the SGP to ensure that the long-term development needs and associated transportation requirements are co-ordinated.

11. In 2021, the Council and its partners (Leicester City Council, the seven district councils and the LLEP), commissioned the Leicester and Leicestershire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (HENA). The HENA, published in June 2022, provides evidence that across Leicester and Leicestershire, the projected housing need from 2020 to 2036 is 91,400 dwellings and employment land need from 2021 to 2036 is 344 hectares.
12. In December 2021, the County Council became a signatory to a Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) relating to South Leicestershire Local Plan Making (November 2021), aligning the gathering of evidence and activity in the development of new local plans for three districts in the south of the County.
13. In September 2022, the Cabinet approved the County Council becoming a signatory to a SoCG relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs (June 2022), setting out how the City Council's identified unmet needs would be accommodated in the County. HDC approved the SoCG at its Council meeting in December 2023.
14. In November 2022, the Cabinet received a paper setting out the financial implications for the County Council of delivering sustainable and inclusive growth and the approach and principles that it is proposed the Council would adopt to address and manage these risks.
15. In October 2024, the Cabinet received a paper on the Strategic Planning Issues associated with the emerging Charnwood Local Plan. This included principles for future engagement of the Local Highways Authority in other local plan processes in light of the County Council's experience of the Local Plan for Charnwood Borough.
16. In December 2024, the Cabinet report on the Provisional Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 – 2028/29 referred to the importance of Local Plans being prepared with sufficient evidence to secure contributions and delivery for critical infrastructure and that it is necessary for the district councils to work with the County Council to ensure that their Local Plans include policies that balance the need to support delivery of growth with the financial risk to the County Council.
17. In March 2025, the Cabinet received a report on the proposed response as the views of the County Council, to the Submission Draft (Regulation 19) Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041. The report set out that there were substantive issues associated with the Plan's evidence base and as the Local Transport Authority, the Council considers that the Plan was failing to meet the NPPF tests of soundness insofar both its Effectiveness and Consistency with national policy. The report also set out that a number of policies required updating to reflect required land and monetary contributions to deliver necessary education provision.

18. In September 2025, the Cabinet received a report on HDC's Local Plan and seeking approval for the County Council to become a signatory to a Statement of Common Ground with HDC regarding the two authorities' 'Duty to Cooperate' on strategic and cross-boundary matters associated with the production of the Local Plan. It focused on the engagement related requirements of the Duty to Cooperate and is produced without prejudice to other matters of detail that the parties may wish to raise during the Local Plan examination.
19. In December 2025, the Cabinet received a report on Strategic Spatial and Transport Planning. This outlined proposals for the preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy and secured approval for the County Council to share initial evidence work, to undertake initial scheme feasibility and development work, outlined how this would be used by the LTA to input into strategic planning, including to assist the evolution of Local Plans to the submission stage and in bringing forward strategic sites allocated in those Local Plans.
20. In February 2026, the Cabinet approved the County Council becoming a signatory to a SoCG produced by the Leicester and Leicestershire local authorities relating to housing distribution following the NPPF and new Standard Method published in December 2024. HDC are yet to become signatories to this SoCG.

Resource Implications

21. The County Council has committed significant resources to engaging in, and supporting, a collaborative approach to strategic planning in order to facilitate the delivery of growth within the County and to mitigate the negative impacts of development, to the extent that it is reasonably possible to do. However, there are now a significant number of local plans progressing in overlapping timeframes. The County Council has limited resources to support the planning authorities with Local Plan development and the associated examination attendance. It may become necessary to prioritise work in this area, as it may not be possible to meet all relevant requests within the preferred timescales.
22. As set out in the report to the Cabinet in December 2025 on Strategic Spatial and Transport Planning, securing the delivery of infrastructure, transport or otherwise (such as education, waste and health), to support the needs of Leicester and Leicestershire's growing population is becoming ever more challenging, particularly where strategic transport and education infrastructure is required to seek to mitigate the cumulative impacts of development sites across a relatively wide area of the County. The County Council seeks to achieve a more coordinated approach to locations for growth and prioritisation of its delivery relative to the prioritisation of investment in the infrastructure and services necessary to support it.
23. As part of seeking to provide necessary infrastructure to support new and existing communities appropriately, the County Council recognises that having up to date Local Plans in place underpinned by appropriate policies and delivery strategies is the most effective way to fund and deliver infrastructure,

maximising the contribution from the development industry and minimising potential negative impacts of unplanned growth.

24. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

Legal Implications

25. The preparation and examination of Local Plans is governed by a statutory framework, associated regulations, and national policy and guidance, including the NPPF. In determining whether a Local Plan is “sound”, the appointed Inspector(s) will consider, amongst other matters, whether the Plan has been positively prepared, is justified, effective and consistent with national policy.
26. The County Council must ensure that its representations are robust, evidence-based and consistent with the statutory tests and relevant national policy, noting that it will ultimately be for the Inspector(s) at Examination in Public to determine the soundness of the Plan.
27. There is a risk that, if the Local Plan is found unsound at Examination in Public, this may have implications for the delivery of development and associated infrastructure within the area. The County Council’s response is intended to ensure that its statutory responsibilities and interests are appropriately represented in that process.
28. The Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer has been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

29. This report will be circulated to all Members.

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PART B

Background

30. Following undertaking consultation on the proposed submission (Regulation 19 version of the Plan) between 10 March and 6 May 2025, HDC formally submitted the Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041 to the Secretary of State for independent examination on 17 April 2026. The Plan will now be assessed by Independent Planning Inspectors to ensure it is 'sound' and legally compliant, based on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2023.
31. In September 2025, the Cabinet approved the County Council becoming a signatory to a Statement of Common Ground with HDC regarding the two authorities' 'Duty to Cooperate' on strategic and cross-boundary matters associated with the production of the Local Plan. It focused on the engagement related requirements of the Duty to Cooperate and was produced without prejudice to other matters of detail that the parties may wish to raise during the Local Plan examination. That report also summarised the County Council's formal response to the Regulation 19 consultation (as fully set out to and approved by the Cabinet in March 2025). The representation raises concerns regarding the soundness of the draft Local Plan in respect of transport considerations. Specifically, it considered that the Plan in its current form fails to meet the NPPF tests of soundness insofar as:
 - a) Effectiveness, that is:
 - i. It fails to provide a coherent policy basis to ensure that transport interventions necessary to enable the Plan's site allocations delivery are deliverable over its time period, especially in respect of interventions necessary to deal with cumulative and cross-boundary transport matters; rather this seemingly has been deferred to the development management process;
 - ii. The delivery of elements of the Plan's spatial strategy are dependent on strategic scale improvements to the Strategic Road Network, but the Local Transport Authority has no confidence that such will be brought forward and delivered within the Plan's time period;
 - iii. It lacks any coherent, (likely) lawful policy approach to seeking to secure developer contributions towards transport measures that will be required to address cumulative and/or cross-boundary transport impacts, particularly on the A6 corridor.
 - b) Consistency with national policy: it provides no coherent policy basis for enabling the coordinated delivery of transport interventions to achieve sustainable development in reality.
32. The County Council's response also noted that a number of policies required updating to reflect the required land and monetary contributions to deliver the necessary education provision.
33. Since making its Regulation 19 consultation response in spring 2025, the County Council has sought to work with HDC to resolve the concerns that it expressed about the Plan, including in respect of transport. Whilst some

progress has been made, further action is still required of HDC to address the County Council's concerns.

Cross-boundary Cooperation

34. On 25 March 2026, new regulations came into force which meant that the 'Duty to Co-operate' would no longer apply to new, or emerging, Local Plans. Notwithstanding this change, the current NPPF (December 2024) still requires "maintaining effective co-operation" across administrative boundaries (paragraphs 26–29 of that document; paragraphs 24-27 in the December 2023 NPPF, against which this Plan is being examined). Inspectors are expected to continue to examine plans in line with these policies. In this context, SoCGs remain an appropriate method to document cross-boundary strategic matters, record areas of agreement and disagreement, and set out next steps, demonstrating that effective and on-going joint working has taken place. This is particularly important for the County Council due to its responsibilities for highway and education matters, given the scale and criticality of the associated infrastructure dependencies.

Key Matters

35. HDC submitted its Local Plan in April 2026 with Inspectors then appointed in May 2026 to conduct an independent Examination of the Plan. The Inspectors have since posed a series of requests and preliminary questions to HDC, which HDC has been responding to. Hearing sessions were initially set to take place between 9 and 30 November 2026, however the Inspectors have now stated that an additional hearing session is to take place on 12 August 2026. This focused session will explore whether the Harborough Local Plan meets the requirements of NPPF 2024 paragraph 234(a) and specifically, whether requirements have been met in relation to the transitional arrangements, allowing the Plan to be examined against the 2023 version of the NPPF. The County Council did not raise an issue on this matter in its response to HDC's Regulation 19 consultation and it is not proposing to make any representations either in writing, or by attending this hearing session.
36. Following the hearing on 12 August 2026, should the Inspectors deem that it is *not* appropriate for the Plan to be examined against the 2023 NPPF, it is possible that the Plan will not be able to proceed any further through the examination process. Notwithstanding this, there has been no indication from the Inspectors that other work on the Local Plan should pause or wait for the outcome of this hearing session.
37. Indeed, the Inspectors have set out clear expectations for HDC to publish a series of further evidential documents to ensure timely progress of the examination and in fairness to all parties. Of those still outstanding, and of particular relevance to the County Council, is the Inspectors' request for a Transport Topic Paper and a SoCG between HDC and the County Council as the LTA, to be published by HDC by 14 August 2026.

38. Given the importance of these documents and the stated deadlines by the Inspector, delegation to officers is being sought for the County Council to continue working jointly with HDC to progress the Transport Topic Paper and with the intention to become signatories to a SoCG on transport matters, subject to concerns of the LTA being sufficiently resolved.
39. The County Council and HDC's officers have already made progress to agree some Proposed Main Modifications (PMMs) in respect of addressing the LTA's concerns (published alongside the submitted Plan). Notwithstanding the Inspectors' requirements, the LTA will require the 'Transport Topic Paper' to set out clearly how the PMMs address the LTA's concerns by providing, inter-alia, the context for addressing the Plan's transport impacts, including cumulative impacts especially on the A6 corridor, including an appropriate funding mechanism, that is backed by effective Plan policies. In that respect, the 'Transport Topic Paper' as proposed by HDC might need to become a 'Harborough Local Transport Strategy', to ensure that it has appropriate recognition through the development management (planning application) process. In any event, further PMMs are likely to be required to ensure that the 'Topic Paper/Transport Strategy' is integrated into appropriate Plan policies and supporting text.
40. The SoCG is proposed to set out what is agreed between HDC and the LTA and if necessary, a matters of disagreement section will be added to identify any specific areas of disagreement. In order for the SoCG to meaningfully demonstrate that progress has been made, the County Council, as the LTA, considers that it must, at the least, have appended the following:
 - a) An agreed 'Transport Topic Paper'/Transport Strategy that satisfactorily fulfils its requirements as set out in paragraph 36 of this report; and
 - b) An agreed list of further proposed PMMs as required to ensure that the 'Topic Paper'/Transport Strategy is integrated into appropriate Plan policies and supporting text.
41. Officers consider that it is important to set out publicly through this report what is required in order for the County Council to be able to be in a position to consider changing its presently established position on the Plan (as set out in its Regulation 19 response as approved by the Cabinet in March 2025).
42. Timescales are becoming increasingly tight to address the issues ahead of the examination despite the County Council's position being clearly set out at Regulation 19 stage. This brings a significantly heightened risk of failure to resolve matters to the County Council's satisfaction in accordance with the Inspectors 14 August timeframe. Should matters not be resolved by then, it appears that this could pose a material risk to the progress of the Plan through its EIP.
43. It is the intention that the Cabinet will be further updated in Autumn 2026 on the evidence base, the outcome of the August hearing session and other matters relevant to Harborough's Local Plan including in respect of the Land South of Gartree Road strategic site allocation and resolving education matters across

the District of Harborough, including the consideration of viability and appropriate funding mechanisms.

Next Steps

44. Officers will continue to undertake effective and on-going work with HDC to 'close the gap' and significantly meet the concerns of the County Council set out in its Regulation 19 response to the Plan in order to support the adoption of an up-to-date Local Plan for Harborough.

Equality Implications

45. There are no equality implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Human Rights Implications

46. There are no human rights implications arising directly from the recommendations in this report.

Environmental Implications

47. The County Council will continue to work closely with HDC and other partners to minimise the impact of the planned growth on the environmental assets of Leicester and Leicestershire.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

48. The County Council works closely with the Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Planning Partnership, which includes HDC, the other six district councils in Leicestershire, Leicester City Council and the Leicester and Leicestershire Business and Skills Partnership.
49. On 16 July 2026, the Government announced its decision on local government reorganisation for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The decision provides for the establishment, from 1 April 2028, of two unitary councils for the area. Whilst the existing councils will continue to operate until implementation of the new arrangements, significant transition and implementation work will now be required. The County Council recognises the importance of maintaining constructive and collaborative working with Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council and the district and borough councils during this period to support effective planning and continuity of services for local communities.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet on 23 November 2018: Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan – Consideration of Revised Plan for Approval

<https://bit.ly/3FbUsNL>

Report to the Cabinet on 20 November 2020: Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities 2020 to 2050

<https://bit.ly/3Uj5oxc>

Report to the Cabinet on 20 November 2020: Draft City of Leicester Local Plan 2020 to 2036

<https://bit.ly/3Uj5oxc>

Report to the Cabinet on 22 June 2021: Urgent action taken by the Chief Executive in relation to the Leicester and Leicestershire Statement of Common Ground relating to housing and employment land needs (March 2021)

<https://bit.ly/3ueF6S8>

Report to the Cabinet on 14 December 2021: South Leicestershire Local Plan Making Statement of Common Ground (November 2021)

<https://bit.ly/4gY3UEg>

Report to the Cabinet on 23 September 2022: Leicester and Leicestershire Authorities – Statement of Common Ground relating to Housing and Employment Land Needs

<https://bit.ly/3EbMySG>

Report to the Cabinet on 25 November 2022: Managing the Risk Relating to the Delivery of Infrastructure to Support Growth

<https://bit.ly/3EN8P9Z>

Report to the Cabinet on 22 October 2024: Strategic Transport Planning Issues Associated with the Emerging Charnwood Local Plan

<https://bit.ly/4h6lZR3>

Report to the Cabinet on 9 February 2024: Response to Harborough District Council's Local Plan – Issues and Options Consultation

<https://bit.ly/41qSt3n>

Report to the Cabinet on 18 March 2025: Proposed Submission Draft (Regulation 19) Harborough Local Plan 2020-2041

<https://bit.ly/4uEC9XO>

Report to the Cabinet on 12 September 2025: Harborough Local Plan – Duty to Cooperate Statement of Common Ground with Leicestershire County Council

<https://bit.ly/4xANPgY>

Report to the Cabinet on 16 December 2025: Strategic Spatial and Transport Planning)

<https://bit.ly/4xvmmxr>

Report to the Cabinet on 3 February 2026: Leicester and Leicestershire Authorities – Statement of Common Ground Relating to Housing Distribution

<https://bit.ly/4uWtujG>