YOUR CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE – THE ISSUES
The South Northamptonshire Local Plan is a framework that will guide decisions made by the local planning authority on a range of issues that affect everyone who lives and works in the district. It will include proposals for housing and other forms of development, including employment and contain policies aimed at improving town centres and the rural economy and other important services and facilities, as well as those aimed at enhancing and protecting our heritage and local environment.

As our urban and rural communities grow and develop, change is inevitable. The Local Plan will help us to manage that change in a positive way, for the benefit of everyone. It will enable us to develop sustainable village communities, build prosperous towns and support a strong and flexible rural economy. At its heart is the desire to create a stronger future for the district, while protecting what we have at the present and preserving what’s special about the past.

The Plan must adhere to criteria contained in a number of national and local planning policies, including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (JCS). The existing Local Plan, which must be reviewed and kept up to date, was adopted in 1997. Shaping the future of the district up to 2029, South Northamptonshire Council (SNC) is working to adopt the new Plan in 2015.
HAVE YOUR SAY
To ensure that the Plan accurately reflects the aspirations and wishes of all, SNC is carrying out a comprehensive consultation with the local community. This is a unique opportunity to have your say about the things that matter most to you. You can influence the outcome of the Plan by responding to the issues set out in the consultation documents and by letting us know if there are any other issues that have not been specifically identified but that you consider to be important. By taking part, you can help to improve the quality of life where you live and work.

WHAT IS THE LOCAL PLAN?
A set of priorities for the development of the district that will shape the future of South Northamptonshire. It will set out clear guidance on what development will and will not be allowed in the district, covering market and affordable housing, industrial and commercial development, including related infrastructure and policies for the protection of the local environment.

WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN?
The government requires every area to have a clear Local Plan that sets out the views of local people regarding how they wish their community to develop, consistent with national guidance and against which planning applications will be judged. Therefore, it is important to protect and enhance our towns, villages and rural way of life by providing them with a set of guidelines that have been agreed at a local level.

WHERE WILL IT AFFECT?
Almost the entire district, including Brackley, Towcester, villages and open countryside, except those areas on the edge of Northampton that have already been identified in the JCS (there will be a separate Local Plan for these areas).

WHAT NEXT?
Read the consultation documents and complete the response forms provided. It is likely that your parish, or town council will be holding meetings throughout the district at which you can make your views known. In some cases, they will be carrying out their own consultation process with the local community. For details about how to download, or where to collect the documentation, see back page.
KEY STEPS

PHASE 1 – THE ISSUES, WINTER 2013/14
SNC will consult with the local community to establish the scope of the Plan, the issues that need to be addressed and the criteria and methodology that should be used in future planning decisions, particularly in relation to the settlement hierarchy and village confines.

PHASE 2 – THE OPTIONS, SUMMER/AUTUMN 2014
After assessing the evidence, the council will put forward options for how to deal with the issues raised. Communities will be asked to respond to these options. SNC will then make a decision on the preferred options and set them out in a draft Plan.

PHASE 3 – EXAMINATION, WINTER 2014/15
The preferred options will be submitted in a final Plan to the Secretary of State. An independent planning inspector will be appointed to examine it to ensure that it meets legal criteria and can be shown to be based on fact and justified by the evidence gathered through the consultation process.

PHASE 4 – ADOPTED, SUMMER/AUTUMN 2015
The Local Plan will formally be adopted.
SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN

KEY THEMES

SUSTAINABILITY

National planning policy states that Local Plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally. Planning decisions must follow this approach and will be informed by the ability of our towns, villages and areas of countryside to support proposed developments through the availability and accessibility to jobs, housing and services. They must also be sensitive to the environment, inclusive and well planned.

TOWN AND VILLAGE CONFINES

A confine boundary establishes the physical limits for housing and other development in our towns and villages. Communities are being asked to consider whether this system should remain and if so, what changes should be made to existing boundaries and if appropriate, where new development sites should be located. Alternatively, should confines be scrapped and replaced by a new criteria based approach, whereby individual development proposals are considered on their own merits?

RURAL SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY

A hierarchy sets out the criteria used to determine the sustainability of our towns, villages and areas of open countryside. The hierarchy will rank communities according to their size, range of services and their ability to support new development. The consultation process looks at whether or not this is the most suitable method for determining sustainability and if not, is there an alternative?
BRACKLEY AND TOWCESTER

The district’s pretty and historic market towns of Brackley and Towcester each have their strengths and weaknesses. Working alongside the Brackley and Towcester Masterplans, the aim of the Local Plan is to help both become the sort of vibrant and sustainable towns that attract people to live, work and spend their leisure time.

Although significant local employment is provided in motorsport, many of Brackley’s 14,000 residents travel to the larger towns of Banbury, Oxford and Milton Keynes for work, shopping and leisure. Meanwhile, the town centre is under-utilised.

Towcester has a population of 10,000, with many people travelling to Milton Keynes and Northampton for work and non-food shopping. It has a very lively town centre. However, this is badly affected by congestion and poor air quality due to the busy A5 that runs through the middle.

The JCS identifies large strategic growth proposals for both towns. The Local Plan will not re-visit these, or any other policies
in the JCS but will seek to apply more detailed and locally distinctive policies for each town, building on the Masterplans that were created for both towns in 2011. While striving to maintain each one’s character as an historic market town, the Local Plan will set out how each will be renewed and regenerated through sustainable growth in housing, more employment and the provision of modern services and facilities, with particular emphasis on the town centres.

**Housing**
The Joint Core Strategy sets out a minimum figure for new housing in Brackley and Towcester for the period 2001-2029. This amounts to approximately 5,000 dwellings. Previous completions, coupled with sites with planning permission and the strategic sites allocated in the JCS, are expected to meet this figure, so neither town should be required to accommodate further major development to meet the strategic housing need for urban areas.

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**THE ISSUES**
- **Are** there any additional opportunities and requirements that exist for housing, employment and retail?
- **What** can be done to improve the town centre shopping experience?
- **How** can public transport between towns and villages be improved?
- **Are** new cycling and walking routes needed?
- **Can** leisure, cultural, sport and tourism facilities and opportunities be improved?
- **Does** more provision need to be made for car parks, open spaces and community areas such as cemeteries and allotments?

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**Our towns and villages are interdependent**
The Brackley Masterplan sets out how the town will undergo sustainable regeneration through limited growth in housing, employment and associated services. It contains extensive proposals for improving the town centre and includes plans for new leisure, education, social and community facilities.

The Brackley Masterplan can be downloaded at:
http://apps.southnorthants.gov.uk/website/brackleymasterplan.htm

The Towcester Masterplan sets out how the town will be renewed and regenerated over the next 15 years through limited growth in housing, employment and related services. It aims to maintain Towcester's character as a market town, whilst securing new, modern facilities and infrastructure, including a relief road.

The Towcester Masterplan can be downloaded at:
http://apps.southnorthants.gov.uk/website/towcestermasterplan.htm
VILLAGES
Home to around 75 per cent of the district’s population, South Northamptonshire’s 90 villages and hamlets play an essential role in the local economy by supporting services in the towns, other villages and the countryside. The Plan will support sustainable and vibrant villages that meet local needs by providing housing, basic services and facilities and safeguarding and improving jobs and businesses.

Housing
It is expected that previous completions and sites with the benefit of planning permission should achieve the housing target of some 4,000 new homes in our villages and rural areas as set out in the JCS. Therefore, there should be no need for villages to accommodate additional development to meet the wider strategic need (although they will be expected to meet local housing needs, including both market and affordable housing). A key issue for the Plan will be to determine how many new houses would be appropriate for a particular village. When considering locations for new housing development, the Plan can take a ‘cluster’ approach, grouping together settlements
that share services and facilities. The alternative ‘dispersed’ approach would consider individual villages on their own merits, based on availability of local services and facilities. Where new development is required, it should reflect the character and built environment of a village.

Rural Settlement Hierarchy
The Local Plan provides SNC with the opportunity to create a new hierarchy that ranks our villages into categories according to a range of criteria, including their ability to support growth and development, their size, range of services and facilities and accessibility to local service centres. The hierarchy will help SNC to determine the appropriate scale of development that can be accommodated by each category of village.

Village Confines
National planning policy guidance strictly controls development in the open countryside. Currently, village confines provide a boundary around individual settlements beyond which general development is not usually allowed. While this method provides certainty over where development is likely to be agreed, it can also lead to a general presumption that all development within boundaries is acceptable and increase pressure for development on open space within boundaries, whether or not it is appropriate. An alternative method is the criteria based approach, whereby individual development proposals are considered on their own merits. Communities will have an input as to whether or not to continue with present system for some, or all settlements, or choose the criteria based approach. If the confines approach is adopted, communities will also have a say in deciding where the boundaries should be drawn.

Local Green Space
In accordance with national guidance, communities will be able to identify for special protection, green areas that are of particular importance to them. Areas can be designated as Local Green Space if they are in reasonably close proximity to the community, where it is demonstrably special to a local community and where it holds a particular local significance. For example, because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including its use as a playing field), tranquillity, or richness of wildlife; and where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land. The identification of areas also has to be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in homes, jobs and other essential services.
THE ISSUES

- **Which** criteria should be used to define the Rural Settlement Hierarchy?
- **Should** a cluster or dispersed approach be taken in creating a development strategy?
- **What** approach should be adopted on village confines and how should boundaries be agreed if a confine approach is taken?
- **How much** and what style of housing development can each village sustain and how can they meet requirements for affordable housing?
- **What** sort of other new development should be allowed, such as employment, retail and community facilities?
- **How** can existing services and facilities, including transport links be protected and improved?
- **Are** there any areas of green space and important historic or environmental areas that need to be protected?
THE COUNTRYSIDE

The Open Countryside is currently classified as any land outside village confines and development areas, including fields, woodlands and waterways, as well as the district’s smallest villages and hamlets.

Together, the countryside and these settlements play an important role in the local economy through agriculture, providing land for development and tourism. In support of the district’s diverse rural economy, the Local Plan will set out policies that encourage the development of sustainable businesses and leisure and tourism developments that will help to attract inward investment. Its policies will also protect the most sensitive and tranquil landscapes.

Rural Economy

The district is home to many rural businesses that help to sustain our towns and villages. SNC aims to support these businesses through lobbying to ensure improvements to high-speed broadband and where appropriate, by allowing the redevelopment of redundant agricultural buildings into small-scale commercial use such as shops, restaurants, hotels and offices. There are also a number of larger employment areas within the district that
are set in an open countryside location, including for example, Northampton Road, Blisworth; the former airfield at Chipping Warden; and Cherwell Valley Silos, King’s Sutton. Future development in rural areas must be responsive to local needs and retain the distinctiveness of the area.

Tourism
South Northamptonshire is a popular tourism destination, with 15 per cent of the workforce employed in the visitor economy, a higher percentage than in destinations such as Bournemouth and the New Forest. Silverstone Circuit is a major asset, with other popular attractions including Sulgrave Manor, the Grand Union Canal, Towcester Racecourse and Castle Ashby.

Transport, Utilities and Communications
Bus services are limited, or non-existent in rural areas and mobility for socially excluded groups is difficult. Many people work from home, or commute out of the area to Milton Keynes, Northampton and other large towns. It is acknowledged that routes and connections between villages and towns and links to local railway stations need to be improved. Cleaner and greener links are also needed for people to access services such as education, hospital and leisure. SNC is working to minimise the impact of HS2 on the environment and local communities and to maximise potential benefits from the proposal.

To download copies of the district’s tourism brochures, go to www.southnorthants.gov.uk/tourism. You can also pick up copies at local libraries, tourist attractions, pubs, cafes and restaurants.
THE ISSUES

- **How** can the Local Plan support the rural economy and jobs?
- **What** approach should be taken towards agricultural diversification and the development of farm buildings?
- **What** approach should the plan take towards existing employment areas located in open countryside?
- **How** can rural tourism be enhanced?
- **How** can concerns about wind turbines and solar farms be reconciled with the need for renewable and low carbon energy sources?
- **In what way** can transport networks be improved, including public transport, cycling and walking?
- **How** can the district’s special character, wildlife and historic features be protected and should any areas be designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?
- **What** improvements are needed to rural infrastructure such as high-speed broadband, transport and cycling and public rights of ways?

WHAT NEXT?

The consultation process for The Issues stage is taking place from 28 October 2013 to 24 January 2014.

All responses to the consultation documents must be returned by 24 January at the latest. Responses cannot be accepted after this date.

- Download the consultation documents and response forms at: [www.southnorthants.gov.uk/1128.htm](http://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/1128.htm).
- Collect a copy of the documents from SNC’s offices at Springfields, Towcester, Northamptonshire NN12 6AE, or telephone 01327 322267.
- Copies are also available from your local parish council clerk.
MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

SNC will be carrying out a number of consultations at key stages during the preparation of the Local Plan. For further information, please contact Andy D’Arcy, or a member of his team at SNC. You can also inform your local town or parish council of your views as it will be submitting its own response to the Local Plan to SNC.

Send all comments in writing to:
Andy D’Arcy,
Lead Officer (Planning Policy),
South Northamptonshire Council,
Springfields, Towcester,
Northamptonshire NN12 6AE

Or by email to:
planning.policy@southnorthants.gov.uk

USEFUL INFORMATION

For further information about relevant national and local planning policy go to:

The National Planning Policy Framework
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/nppf

The West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy
www.westnorthamptonshirejpu.org/connect.ti/website/view?objectld=2737424

Brackley Masterplan
http://apps.southnorthants.gov.uk/website/brackleymasterplan.htm

Towcester Masterplan
http://apps.southnorthants.gov.uk/website/towcestermasterplan.htm

South Northants District Tourism
http://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/tourism.htm

South Northants Council Planning Policy
http://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/Servicepage495.htm

South Northants Council Conservation Policy
http://www.southnorthants.gov.uk/688.htm