

**SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
RECORD OF CHIEF OFFICER/HEAD OF SERVICE DECISION**

This form should be used to record key and other decisions made by Chief Officers and Heads of Service. The contact officer will ensure that the signed and completed form is given to Democratic Services as soon as reasonably practicable after the decision has been taken.

A key decision shall not be taken unless notice of the item has been published at least 28 days before the decision is to be taken except where:

- a General Exception notice has been published under Rule 15 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules and the Chairman of Scrutiny and Overview Committee has been informed in writing; or
- where a Special Urgency notice has been published under Rule 16 of those Rules and the Chairman of Scrutiny and Overview Committee has agreed the decision is urgent.

Unless permission has been obtained from the Chairman of Council and the Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee that a key decision may be treated as a matter of urgency under Rule 12.19 of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Procedure Rules, any key decision will come into force, and may then be implemented, on the expiry of five working days after the publication of the decision, unless called in under Rule 7 of the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules or Rule 12 of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Procedure Rules. Where consent has been obtained to exempt the decision from call-in, this will be specified below. Only key decisions of an officer are subject to call-in.

Decision Taker	Joint Director for Planning
Subject Matter	Harston Neighbourhood Plan – Receipt of Examiners Report and Decision to Proceed to Referendum
Ward(s) Affected	Harston and Comberton
Date Taken	18 July 2025
Contact Officer	Alfie Gibbs, Planning Policy Officer, Alfie.Gibbs@greatercambridgeplanning.org
Date Published	18 July 2025
Call-In Expiry/Exempt from call-in	N/A
Key Decision?	No
In Forward Plan?	No – this is not a key decision
Urgent?	No

Purpose / Background

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to consider the conclusions of the Examiner's Report on the Harston Neighbourhood Plan, and whether those conclusions should be acted upon and therefore that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. This includes considering whether the examiner's recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan should be made, and whether the Council agrees that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions.
2. Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 26 July 2018 that where the examiner has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan is legally compliant, meets the Basic Conditions (with or without modifications), and should proceed to referendum, the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development has delegated authority to make the decision on the way forward, in consultation with the Planning Lead Member.

Background

3. The Harston Neighbourhood Area was designated on 17 June 2022. The neighbourhood area is for the whole parish of Harston.
4. Officers recognise the hard work of those in the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (NPWG) and Parish Council have put into preparing the Plan. Both have strived to ensure that the whole village have their opportunity to have an input into the final Plan.
5. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) screening was undertaken on a draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan, and a screening determination was published in February 2024. Following on from this screening which determined that a full SEA was required, a SEA was produced in August 2024. Amendments have been made to the Neighbourhood Plan to take into account the recommendations from the SEA.
6. Pre-submission public consultation on the draft Neighbourhood Plan was undertaken by the Parish Council from 22 April 2024 until 11 June 2024. Officers provided a formal response to the consultation, providing constructive comments about the plan to assist the Parish Council with finalising the Neighbourhood Plan. Officers have met with the Parish Council to discuss these comments and are aware that the submission version of the plan has taken on board many of the suggested changes.
7. On 11 December 2024, Harston Parish Council submitted their Neighbourhood Plan to South Cambridgeshire District Council. Officers have confirmed, as set out in the Legal Compliance Check for the Neighbourhood Plan, that the submitted version of the Neighbourhood Plan and its accompanying supporting documents comply with all the relevant statutory requirements at this stage of plan making. The Neighbourhood Plan and its accompanying supporting documents are published on our [website](#).
8. Officers, in conjunction with Harston Parish Council, appointed an independent examiner to consider this Neighbourhood Plan. The examiner appointed to undertake the examination of a Neighbourhood Plan must be: independent of both the District Council and Parish Council; cannot be the same examiner that undertakes a health check of the Neighbourhood Plan; and must not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Neighbourhood Plan. The examiner appointed was Andrew Ashcroft. On 27 February 2025 the Neighbourhood Plan. Its supporting documents and all comments submitted during the public consultation on the

submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan were provided to the examiner with a request for him to carry out the examination on the Neighbourhood Plan.

9. The examiner issued on 4 March 2025 a note which set out the arrangements for the examination and on the 13 March 2025 issued a clarification note which included some questions for the Parish Council (PC). The PC responded to the questions set for them on the 4 April 2025.
10. The Examiner's Report on 17 June 2025 (see Appendix 1). The examiner in his report concluded that subject to a series of recommended modifications the Harston Neighbourhood Plan met all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum. He also recommends that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area only.
11. Now that the Examiner's Report has been received, the Council is required to consider the conclusions of the Examiner's Report, and whether those conclusions should be acted upon and therefore that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. This includes considering whether the examiner's recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan should be made, and whether the Council agrees that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions. The Council must publish its decision in a decision statement.

Considerations

12. Where an examiner has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions (with or without modifications) and is legally compliant, and therefore that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum, the Council has limited options in how to respond. The options are as follows:

Option 1: Act upon the conclusions in the Examiner's Report, including making any recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan, and proceed to referendum, provided that the Council confirms that the Basic Conditions have been met.

Option 2: Take a decision substantially different from the Examiner's conclusions, wholly or partly as a result of new evidence or fact, or a different view is taken by the Council as to a particular fact, including that the Council is unable to confirm that the Basic Conditions have been met.
13. National regulations require the Council to make a decision on the Examiner's Report and whether the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum within 5 weeks of receipt of the report (unless an alternative longer timescale is agreed with the Parish Council). Officers have been working with the Parish Council and a longer timescale has been agreed to ensure that there is agreement between the two councils to all the proposed changes that are included in the referendum version of the plan.
14. Officers have concluded that Option 1 should be followed for the reasons set out in the following paragraphs of this decision statement. Officers agree with the examiner's conclusions, including his recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan, and agree that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum.

a. Meeting the Basic Conditions and Legal Requirements

15. To successfully proceed through its examination to a referendum, a Neighbourhood Plan must meet a number of tests known as the 'Basic Conditions'. The Basic Conditions are set out in national planning regulations and are summarised as follows:
- having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State it is appropriate to make the Neighbourhood Plan.
 - the making of the Neighbourhood Plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.
 - the Neighbourhood Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area.
 - the making of the Neighbourhood Plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations; and
 - prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Neighbourhood Plan, including that the making of the neighbourhood plan is not likely to have a significant effect on a European wildlife site or a European offshore marine site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Chapter 3 of the Council's [Neighbourhood Plan Toolkit](#) sets out further detail on meeting the Basic Conditions.

16. For the basic condition of having regard to national policies and advice, it should be noted that an updated version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published on 12 December 2024. Paragraph 239 of the NPPF 2024 sets out transitional arrangements for plan-making. It comments that the policies in the Framework will apply for the purpose of preparing neighbourhood plans from 12 March 2025 unless a neighbourhood plan proposal has been submitted to the local planning authority under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended) on or before the 12 March 2025. On this basis, as the Harston Neighbourhood Plan was submitted in December 2024, the Plan has been examined against the NPPF published in December 2023. Where NPPF paragraph numbers are used they refer to those in the NPPF December 2023 version.
17. To proceed to a referendum, a Neighbourhood Plan must also meet a number of legal requirements, such as whether the Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared by a qualifying body and meets the definition and scope of a Neighbourhood Plan.
18. The examiner concludes in executive Summary and Chapter 8 (see Appendix 1) that subject to a series of recommended modifications the Harston Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions and all the necessary legal requirements. The issues he has considered in reaching his conclusions and his modifications are set out in Chapter 7 of his report (see Appendix 1). The examiner's recommended modifications do not fundamentally change the role or purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan; they have been recommended by the examiner to provide clarity and precision.
19. Officers, in conjunction Harston Parish Council, have reviewed the examiner's conclusions and recommended modifications, and officers and the Parish Council have agreed each of the recommended modifications considered necessary by the examiner for the Neighbourhood Plan to meet the Basic Conditions. A 'Referendum' version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared including these modifications (see Appendix 2).
20. Additional non-material modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan have also been prepared by officers and agreed with Harston Parish Council, and these additional modifications are also included in the 'Referendum' version of the Neighbourhood Plan (see Appendix 2).

These modifications have been made in accordance with national planning guidance which states that minor (non-material) updates to a Neighbourhood Plan that would not materially affect the policies in the plan can be made by the District Council at any time, provided they have the consent of the Parish Council, and that these modifications can be made without the need for consultation or examination (see National Planning Practice Guidance, Paragraph 085, Reference ID: 41-085-20180222).

22. In summary, these additional non-material modifications include the following:

- Updates to reflect the current stage of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Updates to formatting, text and maps to remove mention of policies deleted by the examiner.
- Consequential minor updates to the text and figures throughout the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure consistency with the modifications made by the Examiner to the policies and supporting text.

23. Officers have undertaken a Basic Conditions and Legal Compliance check of the 'Referendum' version of the Neighbourhood Plan (see Appendix 3) and consider that the Neighbourhood Plan meets all the requirements.

24. As the modifications made to the Harston Neighbourhood Plan following its examination do not change the essence of its planning policies, the SEA and HRA screening undertaken on the draft version of the Neighbourhood Plan and screening determination published in April 2024 and the full SEA produced in August 2024 remain valid.

b. Referendum

25. The examiner concludes in the Executive Summary and Chapter 8 of his report (see Appendix 1) that, subject to the incorporation of his proposed modifications, the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. He also concludes that it is appropriate for the referendum area to be the neighbourhood area designated by SCDC in November 2016 (see Appendix 1, Chapter 8). He formally states (see Appendix 1, paragraph 8.3) he states the following:

"On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to South Cambridgeshire District Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report the Harston Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum."

26. The examiner's conclusions on the referendum area are consistent with that proposed by the Council in its response on the submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan agreed by the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning in February 2025. Therefore, as it has been demonstrated by officers that the 'Referendum' version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan meets all the legislative requirements, officers concur with the examiner that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum and that the referendum area should be the neighbourhood area.

Next Steps

27. The regulations state that a referendum should take place within 56 working days of the day after the publication of this decision statement. And therefore, SCDC will proceed to set a date for the referendum once this statement is published.

28. If a Neighbourhood Plan is successful at referendum, the Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the development plan for the area (National Planning Practice Guidance, Paragraph: 064, Reference ID: 41-064-20170728), although the formal 'making' of the Neighbourhood Plan will not happen until SCDC's full Council are asked to do this at their next meeting following the referendum.

Implications

29. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:

30. Financial: the costs of the examination and referendum have to be initially met by SCDC. However, the Council can claim a £20,000 government grant per Neighbourhood Plan once a plan has been successfully through the examination and the Council has set a date for the referendum.

31. Legal: where the examiner has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan is legally compliant, meets the Basic Conditions (with or without modifications), and should proceed to referendum, the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development has delegated authority to make the decision on the way forward, in consultation with the Planning Lead Member (as agreed by Cabinet at its meeting on 26 July 2018). National regulations and planning guidance for Neighbourhood Plans require that the Council considers the conclusions of the Examiner's Report, and whether those conclusions should be acted upon and therefore that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. This includes considering whether the examiner's recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan should be made, and whether the Council agrees that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions. The Council's decision must be published in a decision statement.

32. Staffing: the responsibilities associated with delivering neighbourhood planning are being undertaken within the existing resources of the Planning Policy Team, drawing upon the expertise of other staff as required.

33. Equality and Diversity: these issues have been considered in the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan, as to meet the Basic Conditions a Neighbourhood Plan must not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations, including Human Rights. Included as part of the [Basic Conditions Statement](#) is an assessment undertaken by Harston Parish Council to examine the impact of the Neighbourhood Plan in relation to the 'protected characteristics' as identified in the Equality Act 2010. The Equalities Impact Assessment concludes that: a number of policies in the Neighbourhood Plan will have positive benefits for specific protected characteristics; there are no negative equality impacts that arise from the policies or proposals contained within the Neighbourhood Plan; and the Neighbourhood Plan does not raise any issues in relation to any of the convention rights in the Human Rights Act 1998. The examiner has agreed with this assessment (see Appendix 1, paragraph 6.23).

Declaration(s) of Interest

Record below any relevant interest declared by any executive Member consulted or by an officer present in relation to the decision.

None

Dispensation(s)

In respect of any conflict(s) of interest declared above, record below any dispensation(s) granted by the Council's Standards Committee.

None

Consultation

Record below all parties consulted in relation to the decision.

a. Consultation with Harston Parish Council (as the qualifying body)

Officers, in conjunction with Harston Parish Council, have reviewed the examiner's conclusions and recommended modifications, and officers and the Parish Council have agreed each of the recommended modifications considered necessary by the examiner for the Neighbourhood Plan to meet the Basic Conditions. Additional non-material modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan have been agreed with Harston Parish Council.

This decision statement, the 'Referendum' version of the Neighbourhood Plan, and the Basic Conditions and Legal Compliance Check undertaken by officers have been shared with and agreed by Harston Parish Council.

b. Consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning

This decision statement, the 'Referendum' version of the Neighbourhood Plan, and the Basic Conditions and Legal Compliance Check undertaken by officers have been shared with and agreed by the Lead Cabinet Member for Lead Cabinet Member for Planning.

Other Options Considered and Reasons for Rejection

Where an examiner has concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions (with or without modifications) and is legally compliant, and therefore that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum, the Council has limited options in how to respond. The options are as follows:

Option 1: Act upon the conclusions in the Examiner's Report, including making any recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan, and proceed to referendum, provided that the Council confirms that the Basic Conditions have been met.

Option 2: Take a decision substantially different from the Examiner's conclusions, wholly or partly as a result of new evidence or fact, or a different view is taken by the Council as to a particular fact, including that the Council is unable to confirm that the Basic Conditions have been met.

Officers have concluded that Option 1 should be followed for the reasons set out in this decision statement. Officers agree with the examiner's conclusions, including his recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan, and agree that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. Officers have concluded that Option 2 should be rejected as there is no new evidence or fact, and officers are able to confirm that the Basic Conditions have been met (as set out in paragraph 22 in the Purpose / Background section of this decision statement).

Final decision

That the Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development, having consulted with the Planning Lead Member, agrees:

- a. that South Cambridgeshire District Council should act upon the conclusions in the

Reason(s)

The Examiner's Report on the Harston Neighbourhood Plan was received on 17 June 2025. The examiner concludes that, subject to a series of recommended modifications, the Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary

<p>Examiner's Report on the Harston Neighbourhood Plan (see Appendix 1) and that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to a referendum as set out by the national regulations.</p> <p>b. the 'referendum' version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan (as set out in Appendix 2).</p> <p>c. the 'referendum' version of the Harston Plan be given significant weight in decision making and that the area for the referendum should be the Neighbourhood Area.</p>	<p>legal requirements and should proceed to referendum. He also recommends that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area only.</p> <p>National regulations and planning guidance for Neighbourhood Plans require that the Council considers the conclusions of the Examiner's Report, and whether those conclusions should be acted upon and therefore that the Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum. This includes considering whether the examiner's recommended modifications to the Neighbourhood Plan should be made, and whether the Council agrees that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the Basic Conditions. The Council's decision must be published in a decision statement. This report is the Council's decision statement for the purposes of those regulations.</p> <p>The Council will set a date for the referendum after the decision statement is published. Until the referendum takes place the Referendum version of the Plan will be given significant weight in decision making by the Council as stated by the government in their revised regulations.</p>
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Signed	Name (CAPITALS)	Signature	Date
Lead Cabinet Member (where required by the Constitution)	Signed copy available upon request from Democratic Services (democratic.services@scambs.gov.uk)		
Chief Officer/Head of Service			

Further Information
<p>Appendices</p> <p>Appendix 1: Examiner's Report on the Harston Neighbourhood Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2: 'Referendum' version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan</p> <p>Appendix 3: Legal Compliance Check on 'Referendum' version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan</p> <p>Background documents</p> <p>Harston Neighbourhood Plan-earlier stages and supporting documents</p> <p>National Planning Practice Guidance – Neighbourhood Planning</p>

- [Basic Conditions](#)
- [Examination](#)
- [Referendum](#)
- [Updated guidance due to the Coronavirus pandemic](#)

[Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit](#)

[Planning Portfolio Holder \(17 June 2022\) Harston Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation](#)

[Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development \(10/06/2024\) Council's response on the pre-submission version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan](#)

[Lead Cabinet Member for Planning Decision Statement \(11/02/2025\) Council's response on submission version of the Harston Neighbourhood Plan](#)

[Cabinet Meeting \(July 2018\) – Neighbourhood Planning decision making process](#)