

Report to Norfolk Strategic Planning Member Forum
10th January 2023

Report of Norfolk Strategic Planning Group

Subject Options for joint working 2022/23 and Funding Requirements

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to set out proposals for county wide joint working under the Norfolk Strategic Planning Member forum for the 2023/2024 financial year and the funding requirements for this work to be completed.

The work will help to address any requirement for local planning authorities (LPAs) to cooperate on strategic cross-boundary issues.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the forum agrees to:

1. Endorse the principle of continued, formal cooperation through the Norfolk Strategic Planning Member Forum supported by a shared Programme function to further the joint working in the areas highlighted in this report.
2. Recommend each district authority formally agrees to contribute £10,000 for the next financial year, with the Broads Authority contributing £5,000.

Financial implications

It is recommended that each district authority formally agrees to participate in the continued formal cooperation and agrees to contribute £10,000 for the next financial year with the Broads Authority contributing £5,000.

Contact officers

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Further Information

None.

Report

Background

1. Whilst the government continues to propose changes to the planning system, full details of changes have yet to be published. A new version of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Levelling up bill are both still to be finalised. It is expected that the Duty to Cooperate will be repealed in favour of a more flexible alignment test to be set out in national policy. It is not yet clear how this would work but it is likely to be informed by a series of 'Gateway' checks during production of a local plan which aim to "help spot and correct any problems at an early stage". What is clear is that government will continue to expect local plans to be 'aligned' and Local Authorities will have to continue with Local Plan preparation under the existing arrangements for the time being. This means that the requirement for strategic cross boundary working continues to remain in place. This includes the requirement to maintain the Statement of Common ground.
2. There is significant value in continuing with a work programme into the next financial year to address strategic cross boundary issues going forward. There is also work currently under way which will need to be completed in the next financial year. This paper details the work already underway and proposals for further work to be undertaken in the next financial year.
3. This year has proved challenging for LPAs because of Nutrient Neutrality but having the strategic planning function has allowed progress to be made on the issue much quicker than other LPAs have in other parts of the country. It also gave LPAs an effective way to manage the issue through the forum and has provided immediate funding prior to the government grant being provided.

On-going Strategic Planning Activities

4. There's considerable strategic activity being undertaken which includes:
 - Maintaining links to other neighbouring counties and their strategic planning work.
 - Maintain links to public bodies and Utilities involved in the preparation of local plans eg Natural England, Environment Agency, Anglian Water, MMO, UKPN.
 - Maintain links to other key initiatives in the county:
 - Transport East Strategy
 - Water Resources East Strategy
 - Norfolk Water Strategy
 - Norfolk Climate Change Partnership
 - Support the county in the production of a county wide Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan and any potential economic or growth strategies
 - Support of Local Plan processes across the county
 - Maintain links to NHS estates and the CCG with regular meetings to share updates on key developments and progress of Local Plans
 - Scope to continue to commission joint studies across the county to reduce costs

Current Work continuing into the next financial year

5. There are work programmes already underway that will not be completed in this financial year, these are set out in the following paragraphs 6 to 8.

Review of the RAMS mitigation package

6. The RAMS mitigation package is being reviewed to provide a more detailed plan of mitigation at each habitat site. There have been some delays to this project because of other priorities and it took some time for all LPAs to agree to the brief. The project was put out to tender but no consultants have come forward to complete the work; this is due to the many environmental requirements being brought in by government requiring consultant time. However, it is planned to retender for the work early in the new year with additional time to complete the study and more consultants will be contacted to help increase interest. We now expect this work to not be complete until towards the end of 2023.

Implementation of RAMS tariff

7. It has also taken more time than expect to put full governance arrangements in place for the RAMS tariff. We are looking to finalise the legal agreement between LPAs and the county during January. The size of the fund has been reduced by the impacts of Nutrient Neutrality because fewer houses have been permitted over the last year or so and an assessment will need to be made as to when it will become possible to recruit a delivery manager.

Nutrient Neutrality - Royal Haskoning (RH) study

8. Work continues to support various aspects of the Nutrient Neutrality issue and it is clear these will continue into the next financial year. This will include the RH study which will continue into spring next year.

What strategic planning work could be completed in 23/24?

Review of the county wide HELAA Methodology

9. The county wide Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment Methodology is now 6 years old and based on the 2012 version of the NPPF. The fact it is out of date has been picked up by external parties and could potentially be used as part of an appeal or by climate change groups in the future; it is recommended that this is updated in line with any new NPPF.

Bio Diversity Net Gain

10. This new mandatory requirement comes into force in November 2023. The requirement is to achieve at least a 10% biodiversity net gain increase from the pre-development biodiversity value. The requirement is framed as a pre-commencement condition, meaning that the biodiversity gain condition must be discharged before development can begin. Biodiversity Net gain is clearly going to impact all LPAs in Norfolk and is likely work better over a county wide scale or Anglian area by working with Suffolk; areas that have introduced BNG already have worked across larger geographies. It has clear links to the Nature Recovery Network being planned over Norfolk and Suffolk. It is unclear at this stage if and how officers would want to work collectively on Biodiversity Net Gain but this will

be addressed over the first few months of 2023 and it will become clearer as secondary legislation and regulations are issued by the Government..

Possible Requirements to update the NSPF

11. Once further clarification is provided by central government regarding the Duty to Cooperate and the need for a Statemen of Common Ground through new legislation and a revised NPPF it will become clearer if Norfolk Local Planning Authorities can continue to address strategic planning matters through a revision to the NSPF. The current version is also getting out of date and an update may be useful for any local plans coming through soon.

How will this work be delivered?

Resource Requirements

12. To complete the full programme of work highlighted in the previous sections it is proposed that we maintain the existing shared programme resource with some planning officer support provided by each Local Planning Authority. Resource requirements from each authority will continue to be kept to a minimum but it is important that all authorities support the work to ensure they are comfortable with the direction it is taking.
13. The shared resource will oversee and manage the following workstreams and associated steering groups:
 - RAMS Mitigation Package Review
 - Implementation of RAMS governance
 - Completion of the Nutrient Neutrality Study
 - Update the NSPF if required by any future revision to the NPPF.
 - The shared resource will also continue to coordinate other joint planning activities as listed in the first section of this report including maintaining links to neighbouring counties, public bodies, Utilities, NHS estates and the CCG.The shared resource will also oversee any new programme work agreed from the new project list in this report.

How would this be funded?

14. The existing NSPF funding was provided by the 7 Norfolk district authorities and the Broads Authority. Norfolk County Council will continue to provide officer support for the joint working of the NSPG and Planning Member Forums. The County Council also has previously funded the East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM), and shared the outputs with the District Councils. The County Council is currently looking for a suitable replacement forecasting model, which it will continue to fund and share. It is proposed that each District Authority continues to contribute £10,000 (£5,000 in the case of the Broads Authority) for the next financial year. This budget will cover the cost for the work set out in this report and provide for some contingency for any unforeseen work required in the next financial year. It will also cover work potentially required to review the NSPF subject to further clarification from the government of changes proposed to the planning system.