

AGENDA

CABINET

MONDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2025

2.00 PM

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, FENLAND HALL,
COUNTY ROAD, MARCH**

Committee Officer: Linda Albon
Tel: 01354 622424
e-mail: memberservices@fenland.gov.uk

- 1 To receive apologies for absence
- 2 Previous Minutes (Pages 5 - 10)

To confirm and sign the public minutes of the meeting at 2pm, and minutes at 5.15pm on 7 November 2025
- 3 To report additional items for consideration which the Chairman deems urgent by virtue of the special circumstances to be now specified
- 4 To receive members' declaration of any interests under the Local Code of Conduct or any interest under the Code of Conduct on Planning Matters in respect of any item to be discussed at the meeting
- 5 Draft Business Plan 2026/27 (Pages 11 - 28)

For Cabinet to approve the Draft Business Plan 2026-27 for public consultation.
- 6 Draft Budget & MTFS 2026/27 (Pages 29 - 56)

To consider and approve the revised General Fund Budget and Capital Programme for 2025/26; the Draft General Fund Budget Estimates 2026/27 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2030/31 for consultation, and the Capital Programme 2026/27 – 2028/29.
- 7 Adoption of a New Planning Enforcement Policy (Pages 57 - 96)

To seek approval for the adoption of a revised Planning Enforcement Policy.

8 Pride in Place Impact Fund - project proposal (Pages 97 - 100)

To propose funding to be received from the Government's Pride in Place Impact Fund be used to enhance open spaces facilities and play areas across the district in line with the Fenland Inspire! project aims.

9 Local Plan Update (Pages 101 - 108)

For Cabinet to consider and recommend to Council that they formally withdraw the Draft Fenland Local Plan (2019–2040) and begin work on a new Local Plan under the new plan making system introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023.

10 Wisbech High Street Update (Pages 109 - 114)

To provide Cabinet with a monthly update regarding the ongoing construction work at 24 High Street, Wisbech and the pre-construction design and planning work for 11-12 High Street, Wisbech.

11 Whittlesey Relief Road Update (Pages 115 - 124)

This report relates to the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC) and possible opportunities to fund the recommendations from this 2025 study.

12 Draft 6 Month Cabinet Forward Plan (Pages 125 - 126)

For information purposes.

13 Items which the Chairman has under item 3 deemed urgent

CONFIDENTIAL - ITEMS COMPRISING EXEMPT INFORMATION

To exclude the public (including the press) from a meeting of a committee it is necessary for the following proposition to be moved and adopted: "that the public be excluded from the meeting for Items which involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) as indicated."

14 Port Operations Update (Confidential) (Pages 127 - 148)

15 Confidential Minutes (Pages 149 - 150)

To confirm and sign the confidential minutes of the meeting held at 2pm on 7 November 2025.

Friday, 5 December 2025

Members: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor

G Christy, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

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CABINET



FRIDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2025 - 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Christy, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor R Gerstner

CAB22/25 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 15 September 2025 were agreed and signed.

CAB23/25 FENLAND INSPIRE! - WISBECH PARK ORCHARD

Cabinet considered the Fenland Inspire! Wisbech Park Orchard report presented by Councillor Mrs French.

Councillor Mrs French said she would like to alter recommendation 3.4 slightly with Cabinet's approval. The CP Learning Trust has been in contact with officers and asked if they can work with the Council to transplant the trees to their Fenland Orchards Project in Lynn Road, Wisbech. This seems an ideal way of preserving some of the trees as well as enhancing the Orchard project.

Councillor Hoy asked if there is a timeframe for this as she would like the amendment to include that it be done by the end of the year. Councillor Mrs French said she would be happy to stipulate the end of January otherwise it would be too close to Christmas. Both the amendment and further amendment were accepted.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Christy and AGREED to:

- **Note the content of the report**
- **Note that the local In Bloom group who began the orchard project no longer have the capacity to maintain it.**
- **Recognise that potential negative publicity regarding the removal of the orchard whilst also acknowledging the positive impact the orchard removal will have on reducing antisocial behaviour in Wisbech Park and enabling alternative use of the space.**
- **Instruct officers to work with the CP Learning Trust to remove the orchard within Wisbech Park due to the increasing antisocial behaviour taking place and to attempt to transplant the fruit trees to the Fenland Orchards Project by the end of January with any cost to the Council kept within the budget highlighted in paragraph 4.6.**

CAB24/25 EXTENSION OF THE NORFOLK STREET PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO)

Members considered the Extension of the Norfolk Street Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) report presented by Councillor Wallwork.

Councillor Tierney said whilst he will support this, he believes PSPOs are largely ineffective as Norfolk Street continues to have problems. However, he supports the police but would like them to be more visible and careful in how they use their resources. Councillor Wallwork said this measure

closes an alleyway and is therefore 100% effective.

Proposed by Councillor Wallwork, seconded by Councillor Imafidon and AGREED to approve the extension of the PSPO for a further 3-year period which prevents access through a passageway located between Norfolk Street and West Street in Wisbech.

CAB25/25 ACCEPTANCE OF £1.5M PRIDE IN PLACE IMPACT FUND ALLOCATION

Members considered the Acceptance of £1.5m Pride in Place Impact Fund Allocation report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Tierney stated it is important for the Council in its communications with the public to state the limitations of the Impact Fund Allocation, as otherwise they will be asking why it was not used to fix potholes etc. Councillor Mrs French agreed, she welcomes this and would like at every opportunity for members to get together to decide what the money can be spent on.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to:

- **Approve the acceptance of the £1.5m Pride in Place Impact Fund allocation for FY 25/26 and 26/27 awarded to Fenland District Council**
- **Delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to enter all relevant legal and financial arrangements necessary to bring the decision into effect and manage the funding in accordance with grant conditions.**

CAB26/25 FDC ENDORSEMENT OF PLAN FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS REGENERATION PLAN FOR WISBECH

Members considered the FDC Endorsement of Plan for Neighbourhoods Regeneration Plan for Wisbech report presented by Councillor Mrs French.

Councillor Count stated he welcomed this update for Wisbech. The CPCA Local Growth Plan includes both the March to Wisbech railway and investment in Wisbech, and he is pleased to see these recognised in this report. The Wisbech Town Board is recognised by Government for representing the views of local people and he fully endorses this report.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Christy and AGREED to:

- **Endorse the Wisbech Town Board Price in Place Regeneration Plan for submission to Government by 28 November 2025.**
- **Delegate authority to the High Street Project Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder based upon recommendations of the Town Board, to make any necessary amendments to the Plan prior to submission, should local circumstances or ongoing consultation outcomes change.**
- **Authorise officers to enter all relevant legal and financial arrangements to bring the Plan into effect, subject to future Cabinet/Officer approvals as required.**

(Councillor Boden declared a conflict of interest as a member of the WTB and therefore would neither speak nor vote and that as Leader of the Council he would hand the Chair to Councillor Mrs French for this agenda item)

(Councillors Hoy and Wallwork each declared they are members of the WTB and would neither speak nor vote on this item)

(Councillor Tierney declared that he is a member of the Wisbech Town Board but as he was appointed by FDC he would speak and vote).

CAB27/25 MANOR LEISURE CENTRE - FENLAND INSPIRE! REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT UPDATE

Members considered the Manor Leisure Centre – Fenland Inspire! Redevelopment Project Update report presented by Councillor Count.

- Councillor Count said that this is the largest single project that FDC has committed to and he thanked officers, Sports England and members of the public for their engagement with this project.
- Councillor Mrs Laws commented that the Manor is well used but in a deteriorating state of repair and the growing population of Whittlesey needs a wider range of sporting facilities. She said the café area should be promoted and the addition of the air rifle range is welcomed, furthermore it is pleasing to see a catering kitchen being added which will encourage the site to be used as an events facility. She thanked the past and present portfolio holder and officers for their work to bring this forward.
- Councillor Tierney commented that it had been refreshing to see so much public engagement having followed discussions on Whittlesey social media; this is how it should be done and is a good sign going forward.
- Councillor Boden congratulated all involved in getting to this stage. He agreed there had been much healthy debate about the project and changes made based on community feedback. He pointed out one aspect of debate on social media and that was the suggestion that there could be mixed gender changing rooms, but he said that had never been proposed.
- Councillor Count advised that Sport England had made some design improvements which are included in the proposal but if they do not come up with the funding, then these improvements may not take place at all, or only in part. He said there will be no mixed changing rooms, but there would be private facilities for individuals, some two-person size for parent/child use, larger family spaces and the inclusion of two larger facilities for schools; all of which would be lockable and secure. However, the area is slightly changing, and the team are looking at increasing visibility from the poolside area, with some fine tuning such as the possibility of an all gender changing room covered in section 8.3 of the report. The proposal matches both the Sports England design specification and what is currently provided at the Hudson and George Campbell leisure centres. Further engagement is being undertaken, and information will be on the FDC website; if people submit an email address they will be given automatic updates rather than having to wait for a press release. He thanked Councillor Mrs Laws for her support and for drawing attention to the need for a commercial catering kitchen which has now been included.
- Councillor Hoy said this is an amazing facility for Whittlesey and the upgrade is well needed. However, the Council must listen to peoples' concerns regarding mixed gender changing rooms. Some people do not feel confident or comfortable in such an environment and concerns must be addressed as far as possible.
- Councillor Mrs Laws agreed that this is a difficult subject to address, one of the positive aspects of a village-style facility is that half could be closed for cleaning, leaving the other half open. The cleaning staff are mostly female, and in the evenings, they have to wait until late for the men to finish changing before they can enter the area to complete their work.
- Councillor Count agreed that cleanliness was the most commented upon element of the community engagement and steps are being taken to address all aspects of concern regarding the changing rooms as it is important to listen to and respect the views submitted. He repeated that this is the largest project undertaken by the Council, but it is also extremely complex, trying to keep facilities running at the same time and he would like to commend and highlight the work being undertaken by Phil Hughes as Head of Leisure and Open Spaces.

Proposed by Councillor Count, seconded by Councillor Boden and AGREED to:

- **Note the report and the progress of this important community project.**
- **Note the significant financial situation that the Council faces and pay close attention to the financial assessment section of this report.**

- **Note and consider that potential cost mitigation measures that could be taken to reduce the overall project costs as identified in Section 11 of the report.**
- **Approve the footprint at Appendix 1 of the report in order that the substantive elements of the footprint remain fixed allowing the project to progress smoothly through RIBA stages 3 and 4 and the planning process.**
- **Note that the Council is working with Sport England to secure supportive funding that will offset design improvements required by Sport England that have enhanced initial designs.**

CAB28/25 WISBECH HIGH STREET UPDATE

Members considered the Wisbech High Street update report presented by Councillor Seaton.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED to note the report.

CAB29/25 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Noted for information.

CAB30/25 PORT OPERATIONS UPDATE REPORT (CONFIDENTIAL)

Members considered the confidential Port Operations Update report presented by Councillor Christy.

Proposed by Councillor Christy, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED to the recommendations within the confidential report, plus some additional recommendations in light of new information received.

(Members resolved to exclude the public from the discussion on this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended))

3.04 pm

Chairman

CABINET



FRIDAY, 7 NOVEMBER 2025 - 5.15 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Christy, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor B Rackley

Due to the meeting of Council ending later than anticipated, Cabinet commenced at 5.30pm.

CAB31/25 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - SUBMISSION TO GOVERNMENT

Cabinet considered Fenland District Council's submission to Government regarding Local Government Reorganisation, following discussion at Council as a guide to the decision making and a dispensation from the Monitoring Officer enabling members full participation on this decision.

Members commented as follows:

- Councillor Hoy said she is in a difficult position having already said at Council why she does not want to vote. However, Cabinet is being asked to endorse what Council said and so it would be undemocratic to ignore that. She has therefore chosen to abstain; something she would not normally do, but whilst not wanting to ignore democracy she does not want to support this process.
- Councillor Christy asked what the consequences are of putting forward an option that does not meet the criterion, because some of the options look closer than that chosen at Council. The White Paper frequently refers to Government's objective being to give local control and local power and he wants to ensure the message sent to Government is that the option FDC proposes may not meet their criterion but meets the intent of what they are trying to set out.
- Councillor Boden stated that no option really meets the criterion, which themselves are somewhat dubious, and Government will pay little attention to what they set, and that is the weakness of this whole process and shows what a mockery it is. In some form or other though, Government are going to reorganise FDC, and all members can do is try to facilitate an option that is less bad than some of the other options. He added that Councillor Christy made a very good point about local control and local power, and the Chief Executive has taken note of that. The best control is to have an authority the size of Fenland.
- Councillor Tierney said he is against all the options, and although Councillor Hoy made a good point that Cabinet are here to endorse a democratic process by Council, he cannot compromise and will be voting against.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and AGREED:

- **To note the comments of Full Council.**
- **That whilst opposing Local Government Reorganisation, the proposal of the Leader as set out at Appendix 3 of the report which is that Fenland District Council supports Option D – Greater Peterborough (Cambridgeshire Fens Unitary Authority) be put forward as the preferred option of Fenland District Council**
- **To delegate to the Leader and Chief Executive the submission on behalf of the Council to MHCLG regarding electoral arrangements and any other matters for the new Unitary Authorities, with a view to minimising electoral inequality within each new Unitary Authority.**

(In respect of the proposal of the Leader to put forward Option D as the preferred option, Councillor Hoy abstained from voting, and Councillors Tierney and Imafidon voted against the proposal)

5.50 pm

Chairman

Agenda Item No:	5	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Draft Business Plan 2026-27	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 For Cabinet to approve the Draft Business Plan 2026-27 for public consultation.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Our Draft Business Plan 2026-27 identifies the key challenges and opportunities for Fenland. Its structure outlines our key Corporate Priorities. These are Communities, Environment, Economy and Quality Organisation.
- 2.2 In addition to our 4 priorities, we also have ambitions to deliver several investment projects under the Fenland Inspire! programme.
- 2.3 The Draft Business Plan 2026-27 will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19 January 2026.
- 2.4 The public will be invited to comment on the Draft Business Plan 2026-27 between 5 January 2025 and 1 February 2026. Feedback will be incorporated into the final version of the Business Plan that will be considered by Cabinet and Council on 23 February 2026.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 For Cabinet to approve the Draft Business Plan 2026-27 for public consultation.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Chris Boden, Leader of the Council Councillor Steve Tierney, Portfolio Holder for Communications

Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Background Papers	Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy

Report:

1 [Reasons for Exemption]

1.1 N/A

2 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 2.1 The Draft Business Plan 2026-27 sets out the priorities we aim to deliver over the next 12 months. These priorities have been developed to address the most important needs of our communities and set a framework for how we will work towards our ambitions for the area and achieve our goal of creating a thriving place to live and visit.
- 2.2 Our core priorities focus on three areas: Communities, Environment and Economy. These priorities primarily focus on the statutory and wide variety of services that we provide day-to-day. A fourth priority, Quality Organisation, sits alongside everything we do. It aims to ensure that the Council runs effectively, transparently and sustainably. We invest in and support our workforce to ensure they have the skills and resources they need to work to the best of their ability.
- 2.3 Each priority is underpinned by a series of performance indicators, which are used to track progress, measure success, and identify areas for improvement. All performance indicators are reported to all elected Members at our Council meetings. These public reports are summarised to provide end of year performance updates against our priorities in our Annual Report, which is available to download on our website.
- 2.4 It also remains a priority of our elected Cabinet Members to deliver several investment projects under the Fenland Inspire! programme, launched at the end of 2024. The projects aims include enhancing sports, leisure, heritage facilities, promoting healthy lifestyles and preserving the district's unique character.
- 2.5 We continue to deliver on our transformation journey, which encompasses our ongoing transformation work to improve efficiency and customer experience, drive positive change and ensure the Council is fit for the future.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 For Cabinet to approve the Draft Business Plan 2026-27 for public consultation.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The public will be invited to comment on the Draft Business Plan 2026-27 between 5 January 2025 and 1 February 2026. Feedback will be incorporated into the final version of the Business Plan that will be considered by Cabinet and Council on 23 February 2026.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 N/A

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legal Implications

- 6.1.1 There are no legal considerations connected with the content of this report.

6.2 Financial Implications

The Draft Business Plan 2026-27 sets out our corporate priorities we aim to deliver over the next 12 months. These are reflected in the Council budget.

6.3 Equality Implications

N/A

7 SCHEDULES

Business Plan 2026-27



Fenland District Council

Business Plan 2026/27



Contents

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■	Our priorities: Economy
■	Our priorities: Quality Organisation
■	Performance

Introduction

Welcome to Fenland District Council's Business Plan for 2026/27

Fenland District Council enters 2026/27 knowing that significant change lies ahead. The Government's national requirement for Local Government Reorganisation will see the biggest shake up in how councils are structured and residents access services in more than 50 years.

If it proceeds as planned, Fenland and the six other constituent councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will cease to exist from April 2028, and the reins will be handed over to newly established unitary authorities.

Our Cabinet Members have challenged the proposed reform process and made clear their concerns about its scope, cost, deliverability, and impact on local identity. However, they accept reform is desirable and recognise their responsibility to ensure Fenland's communities are represented, and its voice heard as the changes are developed.

The Government is expected to consult the public on its preferred option(s) for unitary authorities in early 2026 before Ministers make a final decision on which new arrangements are put into place.

Against this evolving backdrop, our focus remains firmly on continuing to serve our residents and businesses, delivering on our

priorities, and driving forward ambitious projects.

Through our Fenland Inspire! projects, we are investing in improvements to sports, leisure, and heritage facilities across our towns and villages. Alongside this, we are maximising external investment, including £1.5million Pride in Place Impact Funding, to deliver even more meaningful improvements that people will see and experience in their everyday lives.

We are also supporting the Wisbech Town Board to deliver a regeneration plan for the town as part of the Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods, which has promised up to £20million for Wisbech over a ten-year period.

Financial pressures continue to affect all local councils, but once again Fenland stands out nationally for its record on council tax. In our Draft Budget for 2026/27, Members are proposing to maintain a 0% increase in our portion of the council tax bill for the EIGHTH year running (in 2023/24, we even cut our element by 2%). This demonstrates our continued commitment to balancing financial prudence with support for those who need it most.

Partnership working also

continues to be as important as ever in our day-to-day work and in the lead up to Local Government Reorganisation, ensuring Fenland benefits fully from wider collaboration. This includes working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority on key initiatives such as its Local Growth Plan, as well as with health and employment partners to deliver our successful WorkWell programme.

Transformation continues to underpin all our services too, driving efficiency, effectiveness and resident satisfaction in everything we do. We will build on the progress of recent years and strive for even greater impact.

Together with our communities, we look forward to making a meaningful difference once again in 2026/27 – creating a stronger and more resilient Fenland for the future.



Paul Medd
Chief Executive



Chris Boden
Leader of the
Council

About Fenland



Fenland is a district defined by strong community spirit, rich heritage and expansive rural landscapes. Located in North Cambridgeshire, the district covers 211 square miles and brings together four vibrant market towns – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech – alongside 29 villages that reflect the area's strong identity.

- Home to approximately 104,595 residents (ONS: mid-2023 estimate).
- Population projected to reach 120,860 by 2043, a 16% increase (ONS: mid-2023 estimate).

- 23% of residents (around 24,540 people) are aged over 64, above both county and national averages.
- Average house price of £225,000 (UK HPI: August 2025), 20% lower than the national average.
- Close proximity and excellent links to large urban cities like Cambridge and Peterborough.
- 135 hectares of public green space and over 200 miles of navigable waterways.
- 66th most deprived area out of 296 local authorities nationally (IMD: 2025).



Our Priorities



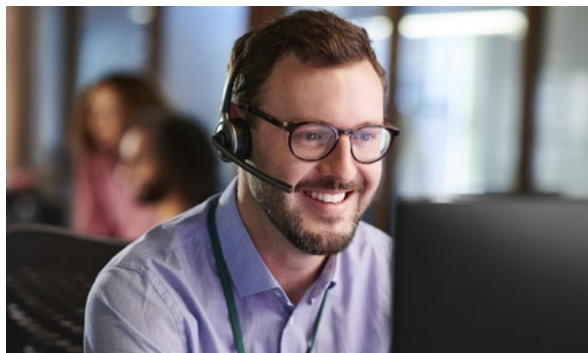
Communities



Environment



Economy



Quality Organisation

Our core priorities focus on three areas: Communities, Environment and Economy. A fourth priority, Quality Organisation, sits alongside everything we do. It aims to ensure that the Council runs effectively, transparently and sustainably.



Fenland Inspire!

It remains a priority of Fenland's elected Cabinet Members to deliver several investment projects under the Fenland Inspire! programme, launched at the end of 2024.

The projects' aims include enhancing sports, leisure, and heritage facilities, promoting healthy lifestyles and preserving the district's unique character.

Fenland Inspire! projects include:

- Pursuing adoption of civil parking enforcement (a legislative change that allows local authorities to enforce on-street parking restrictions in place of the police).
- Districtwide assessment and inventory of current play park provision and play equipment and identify opportunities to enhance it.
- Development of multipurpose / 3G sports pitches in association with the Football Foundation.
- Condition survey work to provide a comprehensive assessment of the physical state and maintenance needs of Chatteris Leisure Centre.
- Securing land next to West End Park, March, to allow, in the future, the creation of a March Country Park.

- Securing the future of St John's Graveyard Chapel, March.
- Progressing the major redevelopment plans for Manor Leisure Centre, Whittlesey.
- Progressing the transfer of land to secure a village green for Wimblington.
- Progressing development at 11/12 High Street, Wisbech, to repair a gap in the High Street left when the former building had to be demolished.
- Further improvements to Wisbech Park Splash Pad, where additional water features have already been added though Fenland Inspire!, to add a canopy to provide shade and further picnic tables .
- Improvement and the restoration of lighting to the Clarkson Memorial, Wisbech.

These projects are subject to scoping work and the development of outline business cases to determine their feasibility and affordability, ensuring that investment is targeted effectively and delivers the greatest benefit to local communities.



Transformation programme and outcomes

Our transformation programme ties together all major 'change' initiatives that are looking to improve how the council works and delivers services.

In 2026/27 we will be continuing our transformation journey to improve efficiency, customer experience, and drive positive change.

Key outcomes include:

- An improved customer experience where customers will be able to interact with the council via a channel and time that is convenient to them.
- The ability for customers to self-serve via a suite of online processes or gain the personal support they need on more complex issues.
- Be flexible and forward thinking reflecting the diversity of our workforce and services we provide and enabling us to continue to be resilient and adapt to changing circumstances.
- Interdependencies between services will be maximised to improve outcomes for local people.
- We will continue to attract, recruit and retain skilled staff enabling us to continue to deliver excellent services to our local residents.

- We will have a motivated, committed, productive workforce ensuring colleagues have the necessary tools, equipment, training, and ongoing support to fulfil their role.

- We will continue to have a commercial focus to service delivery, considering future opportunities and sustainable income streams.





Support vulnerable members of our community

- Enable residents to claim the Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit they are entitled to.
- Use our housing powers to improve the condition of private rented homes.
- Use our housing powers to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping.
- Reduce emergency accommodation use to provide better quality and more cost-effective short-term accommodation and supported homes for homeless clients.
- Use our housing powers to meet housing needs, including bringing empty homes back into use.
- Encourage partners to support the delivery of the Golden Age programme and support older people.

Promote health and wellbeing for all

- Create healthier communities through activities developed and delivered by Active Fenland and Freedom Leisure.
- Work with partners to deliver the WorkWell programme using an integrated approach to providing health and employment support.
- Work with the Integrated Care System to tackle local health and wellbeing priorities and provide information to help people make healthier choices.

Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion

- Manage the Fenland Community Safety Partnership to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.



- Support the Fenland Diverse Communities Forum to deliver the Fenland-wide Community Cohesion Action Plan.
- Deliver the Community Safety Grant Agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Deliver a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service

- Work with partners, businesses, the community and volunteers to maximise the quality and quantity of recycling collected.
- Deliver an effective, self-funding Garden Waste collection service.
- Deliver clean streets and public spaces as set out in the national code of practice.
- In cooperation with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership, to plan and deliver the domestic food waste service and other Environment Act 2021 changes through the shared Waste Strategy.

Work with partners and the community on projects to improve the environment and streetscene

- Use education, guidance and Council powers to fairly enforce environmental standards and tackle issues such as fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles, dog fouling, littering and associated anti-social behaviour.
- Ensure well maintained parks and open spaces by working with our grounds maintenance contractor.
- Supporting volunteer Street Pride groups and other environmental volunteers, organisations and partners.



- Work with Town Councils and the community to provide local markets and thriving market town community events.
- Deliver the Council's carbon reduction and climate adaptation plan including meeting all climate change targets which are legally required by the Government.

Ensure Fenland is attractive to new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses

- Promote and develop our Business Premises at South Fens, The Boathouse and Light Industrial Estates to encourage investment, business development, job creation and skills diversification.
- Support the Combined Authority with their ambitious Local Growth Plan to attract investment into Fenland.

Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration

- Enable appropriate growth, development and infrastructure through delivering a proactive and effective Planning service.
- Work with partners and the local community to deliver targeted improvements using the £1.5million Pride in Place Impact Funding awarded by Government, supporting projects that enhance public spaces, revitalise town centres, and strengthen community facilities across Fenland.
- Support the Wisbech Town Board to deliver long-term regeneration through the Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods initiative, securing and overseeing up to £20million of investment for Wisbech over a ten-year period to enhance the town centre, boost economic growth, and improve opportunities for residents and businesses.

- Drive forward the development and delivery of new homes and commercial space by using our surplus property and land assets to deliver sustainable economic and residential growth.

- Work with our partners to enable new affordable housing to meet housing needs.

- Identify and bid for external funding that aligns with and supports our housing, economic and growth objectives.

Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements

- Promote sustainable road, rail and concessionary transport initiatives to improve access to employment and local services.
- Engage with the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council on the feasibility and delivery of road and rail infrastructure projects.

- Work with the Combined Authority to influence how housing and infrastructure funding is used to stimulate housing development and economic growth and improve connectivity in the district.



Quality Organisation

Performance Management (Performance Indicators)

- Set relevant and robust performance targets to ensure the effective delivery of Business Plan priorities.
- Report regularly on service performance to the Corporate Management Team, Members and the public.

Excellent Customer Service

- Maintain excellent Customer Service standards to ensure we continue to deliver the most effective service to our communities.
- Help residents to self-serve and access our services digitally to allow us to provide greater support for vulnerable customers and complex queries.

Governance, Financial Control and Risk Management

- Maintain robust and effective financial standards, internal controls and organisational management.
- Comply with data protection and General Data Protection Regulation requirements.
- Ensure we proactively manage all risks in accordance with our Corporate Risk Management Strategy.

Local Government Reorganisation

- Ensure Fenland's residents, businesses and communities are represented and the district's identity and priorities safeguarded, as the Government's



requirement for Local Government Reorganisation is developed.

- Develop our workforce so they are prepared for Local Government Reorganisation.

Consultation and Engagement

- Appropriately consult with residents about our service and proposals as outlined in our Consultation Strategy.

Asset Management and Commercialisation

- Ensure our asset base is sustainable, suitable and fully utilised to maximise income opportunities and financial efficiencies.
- Deliver our adopted Capital Programme to maintain the integrity and safety of our assets.
- Work jointly with public, private and third sector partners to improve access to our services, including from co-located facilities.

Equalities

- Meet our Public Sector Equality duty by complying with the requirements of the Equality Act

2010 and Human Rights Act 1998 through our core service delivery and publication of a statutory Annual Equality Report.

Workforce Development

- Equip our workforce with the right skills to effectively deliver our priorities.
- Support and empower our staff to make effective decisions.

Enforcement and Compliance

- Use a fair and proportionate approach to improve living, working and environmental standards as set out in our Enforcement Policies.
- Support businesses to ensure compliance with a wide range of regulatory requirements.

Health and Safety

- Maintain effective Health and Safety systems to comply with relevant legislation and local requirements.
- Deliver all aspects of the Council's Health and Safety action plan to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our workforce, partners and wider community.

Performance

Each priority is underpinned by performance indicators, which are used to track progress, measure success and identify areas for improvement. All performance indicators are reported to our elected Members at our Council meetings.

Communities

Enable residents to claim the Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit they are entitled to.

Use our housing powers to improve the condition of private rented homes.

Use our housing powers to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping.

Reduce emergency accommodation use to provide better quality and more cost-effective short-term accommodation and supported homes for homeless clients.

Use our housing powers to meet housing needs, including bringing empty homes back into use.

Encourage a range of partners to support the delivery of the Golden Age programme and support older people.

Create healthier communities through activities developed and delivered by Active Fenland and Freedom Leisure.

Work with partners to deliver the WorkWell programme using an integrated approach to providing health and employment support.

Work with the Integrated Care System to tackle local health and well-being priorities and provide information to help people make healthier choices.

Manage the Fenland Community Safety Partnership to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Support the Fenland Diverse Communities Forum to deliver the Fenland-wide Community Cohesion Action Plan.

Deliver the Community Safety Grant Agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Performance Measures

Days taken to process new claims and changes for Council Tax Support.
Days taken to process new claims and changes for Housing Benefit.

Total number of private rented homes where positive action has been taken to address safety issues.

The proportion of households presenting to the Council as homeless whose housing circumstances were resolved through housing options work.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports

Number of empty properties brought back into use.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Customer satisfaction for Freedom Leisure Centres

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Environment

Work with partners, businesses, the community and volunteers to maximise the quality and quantity of recycling collected.

Deliver an effective, self-funding Garden Waste collection service.

Deliver clean streets and public spaces as set out in the national code of practice.

In cooperation with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership, to plan and deliver the Environment Act 2021 changes to domestic and commercial waste collection through an updated Waste Strategy.

Use education, guidance and Council powers to fairly enforce environmental standards and tackle issues such as fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles, dog fouling, littering and associated antisocial behaviour.

Ensure well maintained parks and open spaces by working with our ground maintenance contractor.

Performance Measures

% of household waste recycled through the blue bin service.

Customer satisfaction with our Garden Waste service.

% of inspected streets meeting our cleansing standards.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Customer satisfaction with refuse and recycling services.

% of Rapid or Village response requests (to action issues such as fly-tipping, dog fouling and littering) actioned the same day.
Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Supporting volunteer Street Pride groups and other environmental volunteers, organisations and partners.

Work with Town Councils and the community to provide local markets and thriving market town community events.

Deliver the council's carbon reduction and climate adaptation plan including meeting all climate change targets which are legally required by the UK Government.

Economy

Promote and develop our Business Premises at South Fens, The Boathouse and Light Industrial Estates to encourage investment, business development, job creation and skills diversification.

Support the Combined Authority with their ambitious Local Growth Plan to attract investment into Fenland

Enable appropriate growth, development and infrastructure through delivering a proactive and effective Planning service.

Work with partners and the local community to deliver targeted improvements using the £1.5million Pride in Place Impact Funding awarded by Government, supporting projects that enhance public spaces, revitalise town centres and strengthen community facilities across Fenland.

Support the Wisbech Town Board to deliver long-term regeneration through the Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods initiative, securing and overseeing up to £20million of investment for Wisbech over a ten-year period to enhance the town centre, boost economic growth and improve opportunities for residents and businesses.

Drive forward the development and delivery of new homes and commercial space by using our surplus property and land assets to deliver sustainable economic and residential growth.

Work with our partners to enable new affordable housing to meet housing needs.

Identify and bid for external funding that aligns with and supports our housing, economic and growth objectives.

Promote sustainable road, rail and concessionary transport initiatives to improve access to employment and local services.

Engage with the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council on the feasibility and delivery of major road and rail infrastructure projects.

Work with the Combined Authority to influence how housing and infrastructure funding is used to stimulate housing development and economic growth in the district.

Quality Organisation

Set relevant and robust performance targets to ensure the effective delivery of Business Plan priorities.

Number of Street Pride, In Bloom, Friends of Groups and Green Dog Walkers community environmental events supported.

% of those asked satisfied with community events.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance Measures

% occupancy of Business Premises estates.
% of debt on the investment portfolio of the total rent roll.
% occupancy of our Wisbech Yacht Harbour.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Annual Monitoring Report.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

% of major planning applications determined in 13 weeks.
% of minor applications determined in 8 weeks.
% of other applications determined in 8 weeks.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.

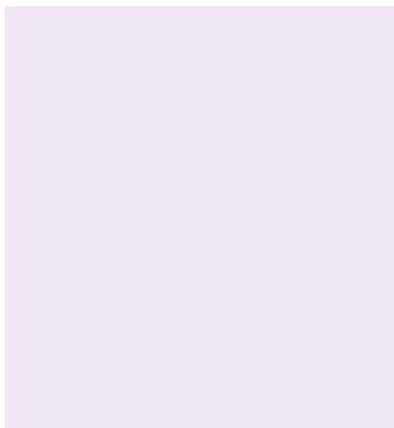
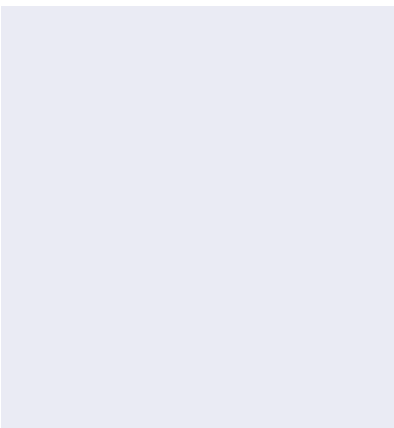
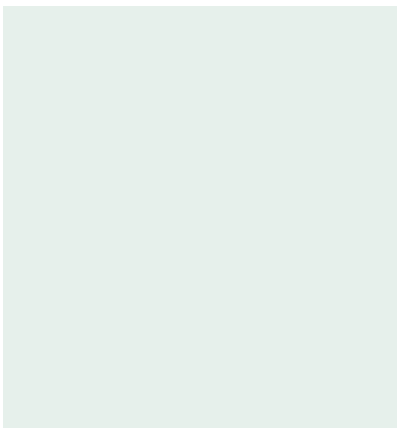
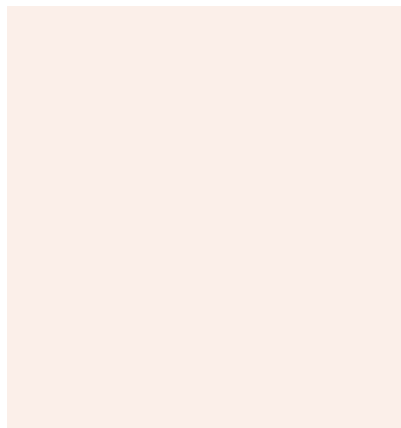
Corporate performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.


Performance

Report regularly on service performance to the Corporate Management Team, Councillors and the public.	% of Council Tax collected. Council Tax net collection fund receipts. % national non-domestic rates (NNDR) (Business Rates) collected. National non-domestic rates (NNDR) (Business Rates) net collection fund receipts.
Maintain excellent Customer Service standards to ensure we continue to deliver the most effective service to our communities.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Help residents to self-serve and access our services digitally to allow us to provide greater support for vulnerable customers and complex queries.	% of customer queries responded at first point of contact. % of customers satisfied by our service. Contact Centre calls handled.
Maintain robust and effective financial standards, internal controls and organisational management.	Annual External Audit Report.
Comply with data protection and General Data Protection Regulation requirements.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Ensure we proactively manage all risks in accordance with our Corporate Risk Management Strategy.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Ensure Fenland's residents, businesses and communities are represented and the district's identity and priorities safeguarded, as the Government's requirement for Local Government Reorganisation is developed.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Develop our workforce so they are prepared for Local Government Reorganisation.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Appropriately consult with residents about our service and proposals as outlined in our Consultation Strategy.	Consultation Strategy and Consultations reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Ensure our asset base is sustainable, suitable and fully utilised to maximise income opportunities and financial efficiencies.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Deliver our adopted Capital Programme in line with our Corporate Asset Management Plan to maintain the integrity and safety of our assets.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Work jointly with public, private and third sector partners to improve access to our services, including from co-located facilities.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Meet our Public Sector Equality duty by delivering the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act and 1998 Human Rights Act through our core service delivery and publication of a statutory Annual Equality Report.	Annual Equality Report.
Equip our workforce with the right skills to effectively deliver our priorities.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Support and empower our staff to make effective decisions.	Ad-hoc staff surveys.
Use a fair and proportionate approach to improve living, working and environmental standards as set out in our Enforcement Policies.	% of local businesses who said they were supported and treated fairly. Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Support businesses to ensure compliance with a wide range of regulatory requirements.	Performance reported via Portfolio Holder Reports.
Maintain effective Health and Safety systems to comply with relevant legislation and local requirements.	Annual Health and Safety Report. Annual Audit and Risk Report.
Deliver all aspects of the Council's Health and Safety action plan to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our workforce, partners and wider community.	Annual Health and Safety Report. Annual Audit and Risk Report.

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Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Revised General Fund Budget and Capital Programme 2025/26; Draft General Fund Budget Estimates 2026/27 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27 to 2030/31; Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2028/29	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

To consider and approve:

- the revised General Fund Budget and Capital Programme for 2025/26;
- the Draft General Fund Budget Estimates 2026/27 and the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2030/31 for consultation;
- Capital Programme 2026/27 – 2028/29.

2 Key issues

- The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement announcement is expected week commencing 15 December 2025. **Consequently, until the details of the Finance Settlement have been received, the figures detailed in this report should be treated as being provisional.**
- In accordance with the decision of Council at their meeting of 17 July 2023 (Minute C8/23), the cash amount of Council Tax raised has been kept at the current level for 2026/27 and over the MTFS period.
- Council Tax Referendum limits for 2026/27 will remain unchanged from 2025/26 and set at an increase of 3% or £5 whichever is the higher.
- Current forecasts for 2026/27 show a shortfall of £1.972m based on the assumptions detailed in Appendix C, before any adjustment to the level of Council Tax. The MTFS projects shortfall increases year on year, reaching £2.967m in 2030/31. Projected shortfalls in the MTFS are usual, both in FDC and in Local Government generally. They represent the challenge to be faced in future years in reaching a balanced budget position each year. The projected shortfalls are however significantly higher than previous years forecasts and represent significant challenges for the Council. Any decision this year to not increase the level of Council Tax necessarily increases the scale of that challenge.
- At this time, more detailed work is required on a number of issues which could potentially impact on these figures, both positively and negatively (as detailed in paragraph 7.15 of the report). Further information is expected over the next few weeks, and this will be incorporated where possible, into the final budget report in February 2026.

- **Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2026/27 and the MTFs, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address**
- Any final deficits for 2025/26 and 2026/27 will have to be funded from Council reserves (current balances shown in Appendix E). At this stage, due to the many uncertainties around the potential deficits, there is no requirement to formally approve any amounts to be funded from reserves.
- An updated Capital Programme for 2025/26 and for the medium term 2026/27 - 28/29 is proposed.
- Further work is required on the potential new capital schemes identified in Appendix D(ii) and the final proposals will be considered as part of the final budget report in February 2026.

3 Recommendations

It is recommended that:-

- the revised General Fund Budget and revised Capital Programme for 2025/26 be approved;
- the draft budget proposals for 2026/27 outlined in this report be approved for consultation;
- the proposed Capital Programme for 2026/27 – 2028/29 be approved.

Wards Affected	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Chris Boden, Leader and Portfolio Holder, Finance
Report Originator(s)	Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer (S.151 Officer) Sian Warren, Chief Accountant
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer (S.151 Officer) Sian Warren, Chief Accountant
Background Paper(s)	Provisional Finance settlement – Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). Autumn Statement 2025 (HM Treasury) Medium Term Financial Strategy working papers. Government announcements since February 2025.

Report:

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the financial implications of the council's priorities described in the draft Business Plan 2026/27. Revenue budget estimates are draft at this stage and along with the draft Business Plan will be subject to public and stakeholder consultation prior to final budget and council tax setting for 2026/27 in February 2026.
- 1.2 Much of the financial information provided is necessarily based on a number of assumptions which are wholly or partly influenced by external factors. Some of these factors, such as the outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlement will not be known until after this Committee meeting. In addition, actual Business Rates income will not be finalised until the completion of the 2026/27 NNDR1 return by the deadline of the end of January 2026. Both of these could have a significant impact on the figures detailed in this report. Other issues as detailed in paragraph 7.15 of this report will also impact on the MTFS and any amendments will be reported to Cabinet and Council at the February 2026 budget setting meeting.

2 AUTUMN BUDGET 2025

- 2.1 On 26 November 2025, the Chancellor delivered her Autumn Budget confirming the Government's spending plans for 2026/27.
- 2.2 The relevant points for this Council from these announcements are as follows:

Council Tax

- It has been confirmed since then that the Council Tax referendum limit will be set at increases of up to 3% (or £5 whichever is the higher), together with an additional 2% increase for authorities with responsibilities for Adult Social Care (the same as for 2025/26).
- A new High Value Council Tax Surcharge will be introduced in 2028/29. Owners of properties valued in excess of £2m will have to pay the surcharge. There will be a consultation on the operation of the scheme in early 2026.
- The Budget says that the revenues raised by the surcharge will "support funding for local government services". It is anticipated that Local Authorities will be allowed to keep the additional revenues, but these revenues will be deducted from the funding allocations.
- Billing Authorities will receive new burdens funding.

Business Rates

- From April 2026 the Government will reset the Business Rates Retention System (BRRS) as a core part of the Fairer Funding Review (FFR) 2.0 to ensure that the local government funding system is fit for the future.
- This will better align funding across the county to the areas that need it. This includes the growth currently retained by the authority over current Base Funding Levels (BFLs), and the grant compensation that has been awarded in respect of government relief schemes and for historic under-indexation of business rates multipliers. However, as part of the reset, this funding will be distributed differently across the sector from 1 April 2026.

- From 2026/27 onwards, ministers have used their new powers over the multiplier to set **new sectoral multipliers**, with permanently lower multipliers for RHL properties. Lower multipliers for these sectors will be paid for by higher multipliers for businesses with properties with rateable values of more than £500,000;
- The five business rates multipliers have been set for 2026-27:
 - National small and standard multipliers have been set considering: 2026 Revaluation and an allowance for appeals. The impact of either revaluation or appeals on the multipliers are unknown at present.
 - The RHL multipliers will be set 5p lower than their national equivalents.
 - The higher multiplier will be 2.8p above the standard national multiplier.

Table – 2026/27 Multipliers

Multiplier	2025-26	2026-27	Scope
Small business RHL multiplier		38.2p	RHL hereditaments with RVs under £51,000
Standard RHL multiplier		43.0p	RHL hereditaments with RVs between £51,000 and £499,999
National small business multiplier	49.9p	43p	Non-RHL hereditaments with RVs under £51,000
National standard multiplier	55.5p	43.2p	Non-RHL hereditaments with RVs between £51,000 and £499,999
High-value multiplier		48.0p	All hereditaments with RVs of £500,000 or above

Other Changes in Business Rates

- There are various other changes to the business rates system from 2026-27:
 - Business rates Transitional Relief Supplement. 1p supplement from 1 April 2026 for those businesses not receiving Transitional Relief or Supporting Small Business Scheme.
 - Various Supporting Small Business schemes. To provide transitional support to small businesses losing from the transition from RHL relief, and small business rates relief and rural rate relief. .
 - Extension of SBRR grace period.
 - 100% relief on eligible electric vehicle charging points, and electric vehicle charging points

Core Spending Power and Other Announcements

- There will be a 2.6% real-terms increase in Core Spending Power (CSP) in 2026/27. This is higher than for other major services, other than the NHS. The CSP projections imply that there are grant increases for 2026/26 of £1.4billion, £0.5billion in 2027/28 and £0.5billion in 2028/29. It is still not clear whether this funding will be distributed via the Settlement Funding Allocation (SFA) or through specific grants. There still needs to be confirmation that this represents additional spending power.

- Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA). The assumption was that SFA would be cash-flat but there is potentially funding for the inflation-linked uplifts that has been seen in every financial year since 2020. On balance, it may now move towards indexing SFA in line with the increase in line with CPI.
- Full details of the allocation of funding within CSP will be announced later this month in the 2026/27 Finance Settlement. The expectation is that the Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), Recovery Grant and the New Homes Bonus will be rolled into the SFA in 2026/27 without any uplifts.
- It is important to note that the bulk of the increase in resources within CSP will come from council tax increases. It is estimated that 76% of the increase will be funded by council tax (less in the first year). This puts pressure on local authorities to uplift their Band D in line with the maximum threshold.
- The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme commenced in 2025/26, and local authorities should receive an estimated £1.1bn in additional income in the current year. The Treasury will guarantee authorities' funding streams in 2025/26 and 2026/27 with local authorities taking the risk on any changes in income from 2027/28 onwards. The Council has now received confirmation of the payment and are due to receive the first two quarters in December 2025.

Local Government Funding : Fair Funding 2.0

- The Government has confirmed that they will go ahead with most of the changes in funding proposed in the original Fair Funding Review including:
 - major changes to the main funding formula with a stronger link to levels of deprivation and population. The current bespoke formulae and adjustments for flood defence, coastal protection and sparsity will be removed.
 - many new burdens funding streams will be rolled into the main funding formula instead of being provided as separate grants. This includes ongoing revenue funding for food waste new burdens.
 - reset the baseline for retained business rates in full in 2026-27.
 - abolish the New Homes Bonus.
 - simplify and consolidate several grant pots, including for homelessness prevention, rough sleeping and temporary accommodation.
 - provide transitional funding, including a minimum funding floor, to protect councils from the full impact of the funding changes.
- The government is also looking to simplify the wider local funding landscape, reducing the number of grants and consolidating them into the Local Government Finance Settlement, as well as moving towards a multi-year settlement so local authorities can plan more effectively.

Local Government Reorganisation

On 16 December 2024, the White Paper on English Devolution was published, outlining extensive reforms to the local government framework across England. These changes include increased devolution from central government to strategic authorities and local government reorganisation in two-tier areas, and in some adjoining Unitary Authority areas.

As set out in the White Paper, the Government intends to implement local government reorganisation in all two-tier areas and in some adjoining Unitary Authority areas. All Councils in an area have been expected to collaborate on unitary proposals that serve the best interests of the region.

Leaders and Chief Executives of the 7 Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been working together on the LGR process. Members had meetings in both March and July 2025, to discuss progress on LGR and to give feedback on the emerging proposals.

Various options have been discussed with some excluded in line with the criteria set by the government, either because they were less financially viable or because they did not meet the requirements of our Combined Authority geography (which must include at least two unitaries).

Members were requested to consider and review the information available on each Option and provide feedback on the suitability for the Fenland area, and for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as a whole. It should be noted that the government requires proposals that provide a solution for the whole geography of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, not just the area that includes our own district.

The Government set deadlines for the LGR process, and a joint letter was submitted on 28 November 2025 which has stated the individual preference of the 7 Councils.

Following the receipt of submissions, it is anticipated in early 2026, the Government will commence a statutory consultation process on the Options for unitarisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This will provide another important opportunity for Members individually and collectively to provide feedback to Government on their favoured outcome for Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

3 LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE SETTLEMENT

- 3.1 The Provisional Finance Settlement for 2026/27 is expected to be announced during the week commencing 15 December 2025. Consequently, the figures included in this report are estimates based on previous funding announcements. It is therefore, almost certain that the figures announced in the Provisional Settlement will be different from those detailed in this report. An update on any changes will be given to members as soon as they are available.

Local Government Policy Statement 2026/27

- 3.2 The Local Government Policy Statement 2026/27 was published on 20 November 2025 and provides more details on how funding will be allocated in the 2026/27 settlement although actual funding allocations will not be announced until the provisional settlement itself.

- The main funding formula has been changed in three ways:
 - It now reflects the 2025 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data. The IMD methodology in the latest data has changed and factors in housing costs more heavily.
 - The weighting for visitor and commuter population has been reduced relative to the weighting for permanent residents.

- The adjustment for remoteness has been removed, except for adult social care costs. This disadvantages more rural and remote councils, especially if they do not have responsibility for social care.
- Major changes to the main funding formula with a stronger link to levels of deprivation and population. The current bespoke formulae and adjustments for flood defence, coastal protection and sparsity will be removed.
- Various grants will be rolled into RSG in 2026/27 which will include the Social Care Grant, New Homes Bonus, Funding Floor, and Employer National Insurance Contribution.
- Simplify and consolidate several grant pots, including for homelessness prevention, rough sleeping and temporary accommodation grant but is not part of the RSG.
- Provide transitional funding, including a minimum funding floor, to protect councils from the full impact of the funding changes
- Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) will be indexed in the usual way. Revenue Support Grant will increase in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) (1.7%), and the Baseline Funding Level (BFL) will be uplifted in line with the increase in the standard business rates multiplier. Under-indexing (of the small business rates multiplier) will be funded through the cap compensation grants.
- Targeted Deprivation Fund (“Recovery Grant”). The Government will preserve the Recovery Grant as at 2025/26 levels for the whole of the spending review period. This is a new proposal. It will benefit the Council which has high levels of deprivation but will be rolled into the SFA.
- Council Tax Band D thresholds. Thresholds will increase as we expected (2.99% core increase, 2% ASC Precept). Both shire districts and fire authorities will be able to increase by the higher of 2.99% or £5. Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will be able to increase their precepts by £14 (higher than the £13 which has been available to PCCs in the past two years).
- New Homes Bonus (NHB). NHB has been abolished in 2026/27.
- There will continue to be “no negative RSG”.
- In line with the previous two years, the Government has made available for authorities impacted by Internal Drainage Board levies funding support which has been increased to £5m in 2026/7. The allocations for this funding will be announced in due course.
- The government has committed to provide support for departments and other public sector employers for additional employer NICs costs. This applies to those directly employed by the public sector, including local government. This grant has been rolled into the SFA.
- The statement also confirms that there will be a full package of funding reforms in 2026/27, and that this will be the start of a multi-year settlement. The funding reforms will build on “the previous government’s” Fair Funding Review, and there will also be a full business rates baseline reset. The statement is careful to note that they “will move gradually towards an updated system” and will consult on “possible transitional arrangements”. The statement “begins the process of redirecting as much funding as possible to the places that need it most”.

- 3.3 The provisional settlement will also detail any allocations from the additional grant funding announced in the budget and detailed in section 2 and the Policy Statement announcements detailed in paragraph 3.2 above.

4 BUSINESS RATES

- 4.1 Members will be aware that the Business Rates Retention system was introduced in April 2013. Under this system, authorities would benefit if their actual Business Rates income collected in a year was higher than the baseline funding determined by government.
- 4.2 There has been real business rates growth in Fenland over the last eight years, however how this impacts on the resources available to this Council is complex, due to the rules and the operation of the current 50% Business Rates Retention system. The complexity of the system has been exacerbated by the number of business rates relief schemes and multiplier caps and freezes implemented by the government over the last few years.
- 4.3 A whole package of changes to the Business Rates Retention Scheme (BRRS) will be implemented in 2026/26 including baseline reset, 2026 Revaluations and new five multipliers as shown in paragraph 2.2.

Business Rates Pooling Arrangement – 2024/25 and 2025/26

- 4.4 The Council joined with the County Council, Peterborough City Council, Fire Authority, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire to become part of a pooling arrangement for business rates from 2020/21 up to and including 2023/24.
- 4.5 As a result of further detailed analysis of forecast business rates income, the pool members decided that the most financially beneficial arrangement for 2024/25 would be a pool without Fenland. As recompense for not being in the pool, agreement was reached with the other pool members that Fenland would be no worse off as a result of the revised pooling arrangement for 2024/25.
- 4.6 Consequently, an amount of £350k per annum has been included in 2024/25 and 2025/26 as a 'pooling' benefit.
- 4.7 In November 2026 based on the Business Rates Reform proposed in the Autumn Budget published on 26th November 2025 the current 'Pool' members have reviewed the implications and have decided that there will be no Pool Arrangement in 2026/27 onwards. This has meant the Council will not receive the £300k which was included in the future years budgets so has been removed. This will leave the Council with as £300k shortfall in 2026/27 and future budgets.

Business Rates Reset – 2026/27 onwards

- 4.8 As stated earlier, major changes will take place in 2026/27. The Baseline Funding Level of all Councils will be reset with all 'growth' income being considered nationally and redistributed in the new system. In the budget for 2025/26 and the medium term forecasts, around £1.4m of business rates above the Council's Baseline Funding Level is being retained. Under the BRRS reset the Baseline Funding Level have been changed but the nett impact is similar to previous years and does appear to have any major changes to the BR the Council are due after this reset.
- 4.9 The Council will receive further details about the BRRS reset in the Financial Settlement but are not expecting any major changes to the funding levels although the presentation may change.

4.10 In addition, the current system of retaining 100% of business rates from businesses generating Renewable Energy (estimated £1.598m in 2026/27) has been include in the 2026/27 budget but the benefits from current pooling arrangements (estimated £400k in 2025/26) have been removed as previously explained in paragraph 4.4.

4.11 **At the time of writing, local government funding reforms, the implementation of Business Rates Reform is a major risk area for this Council over the medium term.**

5 FORECAST OUTTURN 2025/26

5.1 The approved budget set by Council in February 2025, showed a deficit of £1.432k and it was balanced by utilising the Budget Equalisation Reserve.

5.2 The latest projected outturn for 2025/26 is set out at Appendix A and shows a reduction in the budgeted deficit of £1.432k by £1.125k to £307k by the end of this financial year.

5.3 There have been numerous significant variations during this year to date which have contributed to the projected reduction in the budget deficit.

5.4 The main additional cost variations compared with the February 2025 budget include the following:

- Reduction in Internal Drainage Board levies of £433k (£226k less levies plus £207k additional government grant);
- Increase in Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding of £579k against the budget of £958k
- £398k lower financing as a result of re-profiled capital spend and timing of new borrowing;
- Saving of £171k transferring the funding of the Transport Service to external grant funding;
- Increase of £50k for the NNDR Pooling Arrangement
- £145k of additional income from the VAT/RTB sharing arrangement with Clarion Housing;
- Increase in net additional cost of the difference between Housing Benefit paid and subsidy reclaimed from DWP of £411k. Officers are progressing a number of initiatives to increase the amount of subsidy reclaimed;
- Loss of £362k of the closure of the Federated Hermes Trust Property Fund due to a merger undertaken which would not accept Treasury Deposits.

5.5 There are still many uncertainties around the potential shortfall for 2025/26 and there is no requirement at this time to formally approve an amount to be funded from reserves. At the present time, Corporate Management Team, Senior Managers and the Accountancy Team are managing and monitoring the position carefully and will continue to review spending levels to ensure where possible, the amount to be funded from reserves at the year-end is minimised.

5.6 Use of reserves to fund any potential shortfall in 2025/26 will have a consequential impact on the Council's ability to fund any shortfall in 2026/27 from reserves. Details of the Council's reserves are at Section 10 and Appendix E.

6 DRAFT BUDGET ESTIMATES 2026/27 AND MTFS

- 6.1 The Council's MTFS has to ensure that the commitments made in the Business Plan are funded not only in the year for which formal approval of the budget is required (2026/27) but for forecast years as well, within a reasonable level of tolerance.
- 6.2 The impact of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (expected to be announced during week commencing 15 December 2025) will also need to be clarified and the figures in this report make no assumptions about any potential changes to government funding.
- Extended Producer Responsibility**
- 6.3 This Council received its provisional notice of assessment of the pEPR payment due in 2025/26 on 28 November 2024. This amounted to £958,000. Since that date the payment has been reassessed and the Council will now receive £1,536,888 for 2025/26 and an estimated £1,572,348 in 2026/27.
- 6.4 Whilst the 2026/27 payment resulting from the collection of producer fees may still change, to provide certainty to authorities, the government has guaranteed that in 2025/26 we will receive the revised amount. For 2027/28 onwards, this amount will be adjusted to reflect actual figures.
- 6.5 Officers are still assessing any costs associated with our obligations to maximise the collection and recycling of packaging material and any other conditions attached to the above payment.
- 6.6 In 2026/27 the EPR funding is assumed to be included in the RSG amount of £3.161k.
- 6.7 Taking all the above into account, the Council's medium term forecasts are shown at Appendix B and summarised in Table 2 below. The table includes for Council Tax income to remain at 0% increase from 2026/27 onwards.

Table 2 - MTFS – Council Tax income constant level from 2026/27 onwards

Summary Medium Term Financial Plan						
	Estimate	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	Forecast	
	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	
Expenditure						
Net Service Expenditure	17,467	17,820	18,104	18,229	18,579	
Corporate Items	2,169	2,044	1,673	2,103	2,390	
Contribution to/from(-) Earmarked Reserves	0	-189	-189	-111	-89	
Net Expenditure (before use of balances)	19,636	19,675	19,588	20,221	20,880	
Funding						
Revenue Support Grant	-1,589	-1,500	-1,500	-1,500	-1,500	
Business Rates Funding <i>(detailed in Appendix B)</i>	-7,910	-7,893	-7,983	-8,078	-8,170	
Business Rates Collection Fund Deficit (+)	46	0	0	0	0	
Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus(-)	-18	-50	-50	-50	-50	
Council Tax <i>(0% increase)</i>	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193	
Total Funding	-17,664	-17,636	-17,726	-17,821	-17,913	
Surplus(-)/Shortfall(+) before use of balances	+1,972	+2,039	+1,862	+2,400	+2,967	
Contribution to Budget Equalisation Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	
Shortfall(+) after use of balances	+1,972	+2,039	+1,862	+2,400	+2,967	

- 6.8 Government support for 2026/27 will be announced as part of the provisional finance settlement. The projections for 2026/27 onwards are based on the best estimates and information available and are consistent with the announcements in the Autumn Budget 2025 and the Policy Statement issued on 26 November 2025. However, subject to further clarity on the detailed implementation of the announcements there remains significant uncertainty in these projections.
- 6.9 The net budget requirement for 2026/27 is currently estimated at £19,635m after all identified savings, contingencies and reserve transfers are included. This includes the assumptions detailed at Appendix C. With the provisional funding assumptions and Council Tax income remaining at current levels, a shortfall of £1.875m is currently forecast for 2026/27.
- 6.10 The development of the Commercial and Investment Strategy has the potential to generate additional significant returns over the MTFS. Currently, recharges to Fenland Future Ltd (FFL) for officer time, loan interest receipts and future dividends from current FFL developments have been included in the forecasts at Appendix A and B. These are based on the current business plan of FFL over the next three years. Additional returns may also be realised depending on the type and timing of investment opportunities. These are however limited at the current time due to high interest rates and the current policy of the PWLB not to lend for purely investment for yield projects. Consequently, no allowance for any further potential returns (over and above the recharges, loan interest and dividends from FFL) have been included in the MTFS at the current time.
- 6.11 As mentioned in Section 5 above, officers are progressing a number of initiatives to increase the amount of Housing Benefit subsidy reclaimed and together with the anticipated reduction in temporary accommodation costs (partly resulting from the additional houses purchased with assistance from the Local Authority Housing Fund and also from other properties to be purchased from the Council's own resources), **a significant increase in subsidy reclaimed and lower temporary accommodation costs of £600k has been included in the estimates for 2026/27.** As the timings of these initiatives are uncertain, this remains a significant risk in the 2026/27 estimates.
- 6.12 Members will be aware that the Transformation Agenda 2 (TA2) programme is now underway and is critical in achieving the necessary savings over the course of the MTFS. An amount of £170k has currently been included in the 2025/26 estimates as savings from the TA2 programme, increasing to £372k per annum by 2030/31. Significant savings over and above these will be required from this programme over the MTFS period.
- 6.13 Taking into account the proposals in the Table 2 above, the estimated net budget requirement in 2026/27 is detailed in Appendix A. The level of forecast resources available to the Council and the estimated levels of expenditure over the medium term are set out in detail in Appendix B. **These show a funding gap of £1.972m in 2026/27 rising to £2.967m by the end of 2030/31.**
- 6.14 There is still considerable uncertainty around the estimates for 2026/27 and the forecasts for the medium term. Currently there are a number of 'unknowns' which could both positively and negatively impact on the forecasts including:

Risks associated with the MTFS forecasts:

- Potential impact of the Provisional Finance Settlement (announcement in mid-December 2025) on 2026/27 and the medium term;

- Impact of the longer-term changes to the Business Rates Retention system from April 2026;
 - Impact of pay awards higher or lower than currently allowed for in the MTFS (2% increase included for 2026/27 onwards);
 - Impact of potential additional costs and income in 2026/27 from the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for managing packaging waste;
 - Impact of potential net costs of the governments' Food Waste Strategy;
 - Impact on income streams being greater than anticipated due to external factors such as Port Income;
 - Impact of the current review of Port operations and the future liability of the quay at Wisbech Port;
 - Continuing impact of homelessness temporary accommodation costs in 2026/27 and the medium term and the impact on recovery of housing benefit subsidy;
 - Impact of increases in Fees and Charges (where feasible) on the 2026/276 estimates and MTFS;
 - Impact of service developments eg. Car Parking Enforcement (CPE);
 - Revenue impact of funding new capital schemes not currently included in the capital programme. There are currently a number of significant unfunded capital schemes which will need to be considered over the MTFS;
 - Potential impact of the Council's future transformation programme with associated savings. Further detailed work is required to quantify the extent of these savings;
 - Review of the recharge of staff time to the LATCO (Fenland Future Ltd) to quantify potential revenue savings. Currently recharges of £125k in 2026/27 onwards have been assumed in the MTFS;
 - Potential net benefits from FFL of loan interest and dividends from future developments over and above already included in the MTFS generating revenue income;
 - Commercial and Investment Strategy and future potential positive returns to the Council;
 - Review of the General Fund Balance and Earmarked Reserves to ensure they align with the future requirements of the Council.
- 6.15 Further details relating to several of the above issues should become clearer with the publication of the Provisional Finance Settlement expected to be announced in mid-December 2025.
- 6.16 Between now and the final budget report in February 2026 further analysis will be carried out on the impact of the issues detailed above, as and when further information becomes available. Consequently, the estimate for 2026/27 could change significantly from that detailed at Appendix A.
- 6.17 **Whatever impact the above issues may have however, there will remain a significant structural deficit for the Council to address over the medium term.**
- 6.18 The forecasts for the years 2027/28 – 2030/31 are provisional at this stage and should be considered with extreme caution. The Provisional Finance Settlement

announcements regarding local government funding are imminent and therefore, the figures could be different to those included in the forecast. Future announcements and consultation outcomes will also determine government policy and therefore the funding in the future years

- 6.19 As detailed earlier in this report, Business Rates Retention reform, Local Government Funding reform could have a significant impact on the Council's forecast resources over term of the MTFS. Further to the risks associated with these externally determined funding streams the Council should also ensure that income budgets are achieved, and new income streams considered and implemented for medium to long term sustainability in combination with any operational and transformational benefits that the Council realises. The use of general reserves to support revenue expenditure adds to the overall risks to the Council as such reserves can only be used once but the cumulative impact of such use will continue to be felt into the future.

Other Risks

Capital Programme – Future Funding

- 6.20 The Council is increasingly relying on borrowing (Internal and Prudential) to fund its future programme as the amount of capital receipts and the level of reserves available to fund the capital programme are reducing considerably over the next two years. Consequently, any new capital schemes (which do not generate a return to repay borrowing costs) will have to be funded through borrowing which will result in revenue costs and therefore will impact on the MTFS and future shortfalls.
- 6.21 For example, a £1m scheme with a 20 year life, funded by prudential borrowing, would result in around an additional £108,500 per annum in interest (5.85%) and repayment costs.
- 6.22 Consequently, a review of the current capital programme together with potential new schemes (as detailed in Section 11) and the ongoing revenue cost impact will need to be undertaken prior to the final budget report in February 2026, to ensure the final approved programme is sustainable within the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

7 FEES AND CHARGES

- 7.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel will consider all fees and charges for 2026/27 at its meeting on 19 January 2026 and recommend the Schedule of Fees and Charges to Cabinet at its meeting on 26 January 2026.
- 7.2 For the purposes of this report, no increase in fees over and above what has already been agreed (eg. Planning Fees and Garden Waste Subscriptions) has been included in the estimates for 2026/27 and the medium term. Income forecasts within the figures in this report are based on current fees and projected activity levels.
- 7.3 Members will be aware that several of our fees and charges are set by government or other bodies and we have no discretion to amend these. The number of fees and charges which we have discretion to amend and the extent to which any increases significantly impact the Medium Term Forecasts detailed in this report are limited.

8 COUNCIL TAX – 2026/27

- 8.1 The government has set the referendum limit for 2026/27 at 3% or £5, whichever is higher for District Councils (the same as 2024/25). A 3% increase on the Band D Council Tax equates to £7.83 per annum.
- 8.2 Social care authorities, such as Cambridgeshire County Council can also increase their element of council tax by a further 2% (5% in total which would equate to £85.03 on the County Council's Band D Council Tax if increase taken in full).
- 8.3 Council at its meeting on 17 July 2023, agreed to re-position the MTFS by keeping the cash level of Council Tax raised at the current level rather than the previously adopted 0% increase, while recognising that the Council continues to face significant financial challenges and uncertainties that may not allow this ambition to be met.
- 8.4 Members of the Council need to act responsibly each year when setting the precept to balance the ambition of keeping Council Tax income at its' current level with the legal need to balance the budget. It was agreed that raising Council Tax in any of the next four years will be a last resort in order to minimise the financial effects of Council Tax on all of Fenland's households.
- 8.5 For information, an additional 1% increase in Council Tax in 2026/27 would generate in the region of £83k of revenue per annum to the Council. Even with this additional revenue included the estimates for future years show a significant shortfall (see Table 4 below).

Council Taxbase

- 8.6 The amount of Council Tax income recognised in the estimates is determined by the Council Taxbase (Band D equivalents) and the level of Band D Council Tax. For 2026/27, the Council Taxbase has been calculated using the number of dwellings (as notified by the Valuation Office Agency), the impact of exemptions and discounts (eg. Single Person discount) and the amount of Council Tax Support awarded as reported in the Council Tax Base return submitted to MHCLG in October 2025.
- 8.7 In addition, an allowance for growth and for non-collection is included together to produce the estimated taxbase. For 2026/27, the draft taxbase has been calculated as 32,535 (Band D equivalents), an increase of 381 (1.18%) on 2025/26.
- 8.8 The number of dwellings included on the VOA valuation list will be kept under review together with further analysis of growth within the district to ensure the final taxbase calculation reflects the latest position.
- 8.9 In line with the motion agreed by Council on 17 July 2023, assumed Council Tax income has remained at its' current level for 2026/27 and over the period of the MTFS.
- 8.10 At this level of Council Tax, there will be a significant deficit to fund over the period of the MTFS. Consequently, the Council will need to continually consider its strategy to meet the estimated shortfalls shown at Table 2 and in Appendix B.
- 8.11 The implications of not increasing Council Tax over the MTFS is that the Council will be reducing its financial base permanently as it would not be able to recover potential revenue foregone due to the cumulative year on year impact. The consequences of setting Council Tax at its' current level and not achieving the necessary savings/additional income have been clearly demonstrated by the events at other Councils. The ability to achieve significant year on year savings (without

increasing existing and/or introducing new revenue streams together with transformational change) to balance the budget becomes progressively difficult without eventually impacting on front-line services and delivery.

- 8.12 Council can of course agree to an increase up to the referendum limit of 3% and a 1% increase in Council Tax raises around £83k revenue per annum. Table 4 shows the implications of increasing the Council Tax in 2026/27 by 2.97% per annum and thereafter compared to keeping the Council Tax income constant and compared to freezing the Council Tax in 2026/27 and throughout the MTFS period.

Table 3: MTFS Deficits at Differing Council Tax levels in 2026/27 onwards

Deficits based on different levels of Council Tax	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000	2029/30 £'000	2030/31 £'000
Deficits at CT with 0% increase p.a.(as shown in Table 2/Appendix B)	+1,972	+2,039	+1,862	+2,400	+2,967
Additional CT with 3% increase p.a. from 2026/27	-246	-498	-752	-1,006	-1,260
Deficits at 3% increase	+1,723	+1,541	+1,110	+1,394	+1,707

9 REVIEW OF GENERAL FUND BALANCE AND EARMARKED RESERVES

- 9.1 An important part of any budget strategy is the review and consideration of reserves. Earmarked Reserves are typically held and used in a planned way to deal with issues where it is foreseen that resources need to be set aside to meet a specific need, but the exact amount and timing is not known. General Reserves are held to cushion the impact of an event or events that cannot be foreseen whilst maintaining these resources at a consistent and reasonable level over the medium term.
- 9.2 Sufficient levels of reserves are necessary to provide for various contingent and unplanned items that could include:-
- significant increased costs of providing statutory services
 - significant increased contractual costs
 - an unexpected and/or significant event or disaster, e.g. civil emergency
 - an unexpected major liability in law
 - the need to make significant payments in relation to prior year adjustments under the direction of the external auditor
- 9.3 The Council's current uncommitted General Fund Balance is £2m. It is good practice to keep the balance on this reserve under review alongside ensuring that the purposes for which other earmarked reserves were allocated remain consistent with and relevant to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 9.4 Consequently, a review of the level of the General Fund Balance and the number and purpose of the earmarked reserves will be undertaken and any amendments will be presented to Cabinet and Council in the final budget report in February 2026.
- 9.5 The Budget Equalisation Reserve was established in 2019/20 to provide a smoothing mechanism between financial years which could provide resources to help achieve balanced budgets in future years whilst maintaining a 0% Council tax increase each year. The current balance on this reserve is £2.213m and is available

to meet potential budget shortfalls for 2025/26 and 2026/27. Funding the £307k current projected shortfall for 2025/26 from this reserve would reduce the balance available for future years to £1.816m.

- 9.6 In previous reports, the Leader has stated that one of the main purposes of the Budget Equalisation Reserve was to facilitate a form of feedback loop to counter what he described as the Council's systemic historic outturn surpluses. However, the deficit incurred in 2023/24 of £212k was the first for several years and demonstrated the challenging financial environment all Councils are currently experiencing. Table 5 below, details the historic surpluses prior to 2023/24 and the movement to a deficit position from 2023/24 although there was small surplus in 2024/25. This deficit position is projected to worsen in 2026/27 and increase significantly in 2027/28. It is, ultimately, a matter of political interpretation whether the pattern of historic repeated outturn surpluses was evidence of taxing residents more than we need to each year, or if it bears a different interpretation. That is entirely a political matter for Cabinet and Full Council to consider. It is though quite clear that the pattern of historic surpluses will not be repeated and there will be significant deficits over the MTFS for the Council to address.
- 9.7 At a time of much personal financial pressure for households across Fenland, the Leader proposed, and Full Council approved at their budget meeting in February 2023, a one-off 2% reduction in Council tax in 2023/24. Subsequently, Council at its meeting on 17 July 2023, agreed to re-position the MTFS by keeping the cash level of Council Tax raised at the current level and adopted a 0% increase, while recognising that the Council continues to face significant financial challenges and uncertainties that may not allow this ambition to be met. The decisions by Council in February and July 2023 was considered a more effective and appropriate way to eliminate the Council's pattern of outturn surpluses, and that the fact that the Budget Equalisation Reserve now stands at £2.213m (before any potential use to fund any shortfall in 2025/26) provides a limited facility to smooth any short term revenue account budget pressures in any year(s) over the term of the MTFS. The scale of the forecast deficits in the current year, 2026/27 and over the MTFS are significantly higher than what will be available to fund from the Budget Equalisation Reserve and further significant cost savings and/or income generation (eg. Council Tax increases) will be required to set a legally balanced budget.

Table 4: Net Deficit/Surplus(-) transferred from/(to) Budget Equalisation Reserve

	Budget £000	Outturn £000		Outturn Transferred to(+)/from(-)	
				Budget Equalisation	Reserve Balance
2025/26	1,432	307 (projected)		-307	1,477
2024/25	-3	-130		130	1,784
2023/24	-4	212		-212	1,654
2022/23	203	-800		800	1,866
2021/22	842	-584		584	1,066
2020/21	0	-167		167	482
2019/20	151	-115		115	315
2018/19	73	-200		200	

- 9.8 The analysis of reserves at Appendix E details the projected General Fund and earmarked reserves position as at 31 March 2026 and 31 March 2027 before any

use of these reserves to fund the potential shortfalls detailed at Appendix A. The final budget report to be considered by Cabinet and Council on 23 February 2026 will consider the use of these reserves.

10 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- 10.1 Capital Expenditure and Income plans have been prepared through the Council's service and financial planning cycle. The Council's capital resources are dependent on government funding, external grants or through the ongoing disposal of assets.
- 10.2 Since February 2025, Members have continued to receive regular updates on several high-profile schemes including Wisbech High Street. In addition, Cabinet at their meetings of 30 September 2024 and 15 November 2024, have approved the purchase of additional properties to help support the Council's housing duties and these are included in Appendix D(i).
- 10.3 An updated Capital Programme for 2025-29 is presented at Appendix D(i) for approval. The programme has been updated to ensure it adequately reflects the cost and anticipated timing of schemes previously approved. **At this stage, no further capital schemes over and above those already approved have been included in the updated programme and no further financing costs included in the MTFS.**
- 10.4 No allowance has yet been made for any potential new schemes detailed in Appendix D(ii). These schemes will be subject to further review by officers and members prior to determining the final budget proposals in February 2026. **The potential additional revenue costs associated with any new schemes will increase the financial challenges facing the Council over the MTFS period.**
- 10.5 In addition, no allowance has yet been made for the following developments which will also significantly impact the Council's capital programme.

Fenland Inspire

- 10.6 Following the approval by Cabinet in February 2025, the initialisation of the Fenland Inspire! Project was progressed and borrowing earmarked and agreed by Full Council was £30m over a three-year period.
- 10.7 The Fenland District Council Business Plan 2025/26 outlines the list of these initiatives identified by Cabinet Members under the Fenland Inspire! banner. It is envisaged that these projects will enhance sports, leisure, and heritage facilities, promote healthy lifestyles and preserve the district's unique character.
- 10.8 There is the potential for certain Fenland Inspire! projects to generate an income for the Council, although this information is not yet available. Work will continue to develop supplementary funding strategies, including grant funding opportunities. However, in some cases, grant funding will not only dictate the scope of the project (potentially in contrast to the original Member vision), but it will also require an upfront investment in the design brief to secure.
- 10.9 Planning permission is required for a number of projects and in some cases listed building consent will be needed. Whilst in all cases of planning applications there is a risk that conditional approval may require an increased spend. Biodiversity net gain may be a consideration within some projects.
- 10.10 In December 2024, Central Government delivered the 'White Paper – Local Government Reorganisation' stating that all District Councils will cease to exist from 1 April 2028. This announcement contributed to the decision to undertake the

Fenland Inspire! programme with an aim to deliver all projects within the timeframe Central Government has specified for LGR. Therefore, it has been proposed that all Fenland Inspire! projects are completed by the deadline of 31 March 2028

- 10.11 Should resources from external funding and/or capital receipts not generate the level of receipts forecast, or there is a delay in disposal of assets, then the capital programme will need re-visiting to ensure funding is sufficient to meet proposed expenditure including through borrowing. Reviews of the programme and resources available are carried out regularly during the year.
- 10.12 The Council's Borrowing Strategy which is incorporated into the Council's Treasury Management Strategy Statement, recognises that prudential borrowing will be required over the life of the capital programme. Details of the estimated borrowing required is detailed at Appendix D. The projected annual revenue costs for the Council of the current approved programme are reflected in the medium term forecasts at Appendix B.
- 10.13 As stated earlier, a review of the current and future capital programme and its ongoing revenue cost impact will be undertaken to ensure the programme is sustainable within the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

11 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 There is an element of risk inherent in any process that looks into the future to make forecasts, particularly in the current economic climate and other national and international events now or in the future that may impact on the Council either directly or indirectly. The Council has a strong track record in good financial management as recognised in the recent Annual Audit Letter. This risk is further minimised by adopting the following methodology when preparing the estimates:-
- Service managers and the Accountancy Team working together to define likely service income/expenditure patterns matched with service delivery plans;
 - Maintaining "earmarked" reserves for expenditure that it is known will occur but the exact amount and timing of the expenditure is not known;
 - Maintaining an adequate level of general reserves to meet sudden and or unforeseen expenditure;
 - Adopting clear guidelines and control systems (robust revenue and capital budget management and monitoring procedures, Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules etc.) to alert service managers, and members before variances reach tolerance levels;
 - Using professional and expert advice and economic forecasts where these are available, e.g. treasury management, interest rates;
 - Maintaining a rolling review of forecast estimates beyond the current year.
- 11.2 These assumptions are made with all available information but are necessarily calculated based on broad assumptions. In the current economic climate, some of these assumptions are particularly volatile. The MTFs will be prepared annually on a rolling basis so that as information becomes more certain the figures will be updated, and early consideration can be given to any action or changes in direction that may be required.

12 CORPORATE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER (\$151 Officer) STATEMENT

- 12.1 The proposed budget is set against the context of significant economic uncertainty, the current cost of living crisis, together with considerable uncertainty regarding government funding over the MTFS. The Government intends to make fundamental changes to the funding system for Local Government through the introduction of a new needs based fairer funding formula and the introduction of business rates. In addition, the New Homes Bonus has been abolished in 2026/27 and there is still uncertainty around the net impact of the Food Waste and the Simpler Recycling reforms. The cumulative impact of these changes and lack of visibility on any transition or damping arrangements means that financial planning for 2026/27 and the medium term is very uncertain.
- 12.2 Although there are still many uncertainties around the estimates for 2026/27 and over the medium term to 2030/31 detailed in this report, there are undoubtedly significant challenges facing the Council over the next few years. The report also highlights several major areas of risk which could also adversely affect the estimates over the MTFS. Of particular concern is the additional revenue impact of any new capital schemes which may be included in the final budget in February 2026.
- 12.3 As detailed in the report, Council Tax over each year of the MTFS has been included at its' current level in accordance with the decision by Council at its' meeting on 17 July 2023. At this level, there are currently estimated shortfalls of £1.972m in 2026/27, rising to £2.967m in 2030/31.
- 12.4 These represent a significant challenge for the Council and it is therefore, imperative that a robust savings strategy is in place to meet these challenges.
- 12.5 Consequently, the delivery of the planned savings and major business projects **is critical** to the successful delivery of the Council's budget strategy. **Even with these, the scale of the forecast deficits over the MTFS period means that the current Council Tax strategy of having as a 0% increase per annum, is unsustainable and future increases in Council Tax inevitable to help deliver a balanced budget.** Table 4 in Section 9 of this report exemplifies the impact of increasing Council Tax by up to 3% (the current referendum limit) on the shortfalls over the MTFS detailed in Appendix B.
- 12.6 Given the uncertainties detailed in this report, it is imperative that the Council maintains sufficient resources to cover any in-year unforeseen expenditure. A risk based approach to the consideration of the level of reserves is a component of the Council's overall risk management framework. Operational risks should be managed within Services' bottom line budgets and thus will not normally result in any further call on the Council's General Balances, as detailed in Section 10 above.

APPENDIX A

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
Summary of Revenue Estimates

	Council 24.02.25 Original Estimate 2025/26 £	Cabinet 15.12.25 Projected Outturn 2025/26 £	Cabinet 15.12.25 Draft Estimate 2026/27 £
Service Summary			
Growth & Infrastructure	1,459,230	1,162,736	945,949
Communities, Environment, Leisure & Planning	6,611,090	6,269,583	6,270,552
Resources & Customer Services	10,495,204	10,172,566	10,622,598
ERS NI Contributions - Government Grant	-123,812	0	0
Vacancy Factor (1.5%)	-239,000	0	0
Transformation & Service Review Programme savings	-550,000	0	-372,000
NET COST OF GENERAL FUND SERVICES	17,652,712	17,604,885	17,467,099
Corporate Items			
Internal Drainage Board Levies	2,468,240	2,242,621	2,354,740
Internal Drainage Board Levies Grant	-313,000	-520,000	-520,000
Contributions to/ (from) Earmarked Reserves	-1,034,595	-692,014	0
RTB/VAT Sharing Income	-20,000	-164,505	-50,000
Financing Charges - <i>Interest on External Borrowings</i>	1,169,467	824,452	1,655,480
Financing Charges - <i>MRP current Capital Programme</i>	652,000	652,000	945,666
Investment Income and Property Funds Income	-660,000	-575,000	-210,000
Property Funds Costs	0	362,948	0
New Homes Bonus	-592,628	-592,628	0
Recovery Grant	-435,149	-435,149	-435,149
Extended Producer Responsibility Payment -pEPR	-958,000	-1,536,888	-1,572,348
Corporate Items	276,335	-434,163	2,168,389
Net Expenditure	17,929,047	17,170,722	19,635,488
Contribution to/from(-) Budget Equalisation Reserve	-1,432,283	0	0
NET EXPENDITURE after use of balances	16,496,764	17,170,722	19,635,488
Core Funding			
Revenue Support Grant	-203,673	-203,673	-1,588,597
Business Rates - Income due in Year			
Business Rates Funding	-11,580,863	-11,580,863	-12,095,352
Tariff Payment to Government	7,636,697	7,636,697	7,682,874
Renewable Energy Rates Retained	-1,578,437	-1,578,437	-1,597,705
Business Rates Pool - FDC Share of Benefit	-350,000	-400,000	0
Business Rates S31 Grants due in year	-2,999,641	-3,372,954	-2,598,064
Business Rates Levy due in year	775,691	801,029	698,331
Business Rates Levy Account Surplus allocation	-31,046	0	0
	-8,127,599	-8,494,528	-7,909,916
Business Rates Collection Fund Deficit(+)/Surplus(-)	45,154	45,154	45,692
Council Tax Collection Fund Deficit(+)/Surplus(-)	-18,133	-18,133	-18,133
Council Tax	-8,192,513	-8,192,513	-8,192,513
Business Rates and Council Tax Funding	-16,496,764	-16,863,693	-17,663,466
Surplus(-)/Shortfall(+)	0	307,029	1,972,022

APPENDIX B

(Council Tax income level 0% onwards)

Medium Term Financial Strategy	Estimate 2025/26 £000	Estimate 2026/27 £000	Forecast 2027/28 £000	Forecast 2028/29 £000	Forecast 2029/30 £000	Forecast 2030/31 £000
Expenditure						
Service Expenditure/Income						
Gross Service Expenditure	29,297	29,095	30,020	30,514	31,020	31,656
Gross Service Income	-11,692	-11,255	-11,753	-11,924	-12,299	-12,579
Vacancy Factor (1.5%)	0	0	-244	-250	-256	-262
Transformation Programme - additional savings	0	-372	-203	-236	-236	-236
Total Net Service Expenditure	17,605	17,468	17,820	18,104	18,229	18,579
Corporate Items						
Corporate Expenditure/Savings						
Internal Drainage Board Levies	2,243	2,355	2,482	2,606	2,736	2,873
Internal Drainage Board Levies Grant	-520	-520	-520	-520	-520	-520
Financing Charges - Interest on External Borrowing	824	1,655	1,755	1,310	1,360	1,460
Financing Charges - MRP Current Capital Programme	652	945	751	801	851	901
	3,199	4,435	4,468	4,197	4,427	4,714
Corporate Income Items						
Contribution to(+)/from(-) Earmarked Reserves	-692	0	-458	-558	-480	-458
RTB/VAT Sharing Income	-165	-50	-20	-20	-20	-20
Investment and Property Fund Income	-575	-210	-500	-500	-400	-400
Property Fund Costs	363	0	0	0	0	0
New Homes Bonus	-593	0	0	0	0	0
Recovery Grant	-435	-435	-435	-435	-435	-435
Extended Producer Responsibility Payment -pEPR	-1,537	-1,572	-1,000	-1,000	-900	-900
Contribution to/from(-) Budget Equalisation Reserve	0	0	0	0	0	0
	-3,634	-2,267	-2,413	-2,513	-2,235	-2,213
Total Corporate Items	-435	2,168	2,055	1,684	2,192	2,501
Gross Service/Corporate Expenditure	32,496	33,158	34,041	34,225	34,955	35,872
Gross Service/Corporate Income	-15,326	-13,522	-14,166	-14,437	-14,534	-14,792
Net Budget Requirement	17,170	19,636	19,875	19,788	20,421	21,080
Funding - RSG, Business Rates & Council Tax						
Revenue Support Grant	-204	-1,589	-1,700	-1,700	-1,700	-1,700
Business Rates						
Business Rates Baseline Funding	-11,581	-12,095	-12,111	-12,309	-12,510	-12,715
Tariff Payment to Government	7,637	7,683	7,850	8,007	8,167	8,330
Renewable Energy Rates Retained	-1,578	-1,598	-1,598	-1,606	-1,619	-1,628
Business Rates Pool - FDC Share of Benefit	-400	0	0	0	0	0
Business Rates S31 Grants due in year	-3,372	-2,598	-2,673	-2,692	-2,711	-2,730
Business Rates Levy due in year	801	698	639	617	595	573
Business Rates Collection Fund Deficit/Surplus(-)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Business Rates Funding	-8,493	-7,910	-7,893	-7,983	-8,078	-8,170
Council Tax						
Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus(-)/Deficit	27	28	-50	-50	-50	-50
Council Tax (Constant level 2025/26 onwards)	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193	-8,193
Total Council Tax Funding	-8,166	-8,165	-8,243	-8,243	-8,243	-8,243
Total Funding - RSG/Business Rates/Council Tax	-16,863	-17,664	-17,836	-17,926	-18,021	-18,113
Surplus(-)/Shortfall(+)	+307	+1,972	+2,039	+1,862	+2,400	+2,967

Assumptions built into Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

Within the forecasts are a number of assumptions which are necessary to produce the overall budget strategy. However, there is an element of risk associated with this process although the aim is to mitigate these risks as detailed in section 12 of the main report.

The main assumptions are as follows:

- Council Tax income has been included at its current level over the period of the MTFS (£8.193m in 2026/27 and thereafter). With the estimated increases in the Council Tax base, this equates to a reduction in Band D Council Tax levels of £2.98 or 1.17% for 2026/27 with further similar reductions in the following years. The cumulative reduction in Council Tax by 2029/30 would be around £14.94 or 5.86%. (For comparison, a 0% increase would generate £83k resources and a 3% increase around £246k of resources in 2026/27).
- 1.18% increase in Council Tax base in 2026/27 (Tax-base 32,535) and thereafter (increase of 500 Band D equivalent properties in 2027/28 rising to 530 in 2030/31).
- Inflation increases in Retained Business Rates income from 2026/27 onwards. Future net benefits or reduced retained income from Business Rates will be dependent upon the impact of the system re-set and other changes from April 2026 onwards.
- Based on the Business Rates Retention System from April 2026 the Cambridgeshire Business Rates Pool has been demolished in 2026/27 which means that the Council's share (£350k) of the potential benefit in previous years has been removed from the 2026/27 and future years budgets.
- The New Homes Bonus has been abolished in 2026/27, and the total amount of funding will now be included within the overall Finance Settlement.
- 2% pay award has been built into the 2026/27 but the Council has recently received a pay claim from the NJC Trade Unions which may change this for February's Budget Report.
- Employer's Pension Contributions – following the triennial valuation as at 31.03.2025, the contribution rate for 2026/27 – 2028/29 increased to 21.4% of salary (17.6% in 2025/26). The Council have previously paid an additional past deficit lump sum payment of £922k for 2023/24, £884k for 2024/25 and £845k for 2025/26 representing an overall increase of 1% p.a. in total contributions but this has not been confirmed at the time of this report and therefore the 17.6% has been used in the salaries calculation.
- Specific allowance for inflation where required eg: employee costs (as detailed above), business rates, external contracts, energy and water, fuel costs etc. Otherwise, no allowance for inflation has been included.
- Estimated 5% increase in Internal Drainage Board Levies in 2026/27 and thereafter. The actual levies are not set by the Drainage Boards until after we have set our budget and Council Tax levels. To help off-set these increases, the government is once again allocating £5m nationally to the worst affected authorities. In 2025/26 we were allocated £520k of IDB grant and the same amount has been confirmed for 2026/27 which has been included.

- Investment interest rates are forecast to remain at current levels of 4% until Q1, 2026 before subsequently decreasing back to 3.6% in Q4, 2026 (£210k estimated income from temporary investments in 2026/27).
- Investment income includes the £2m investment in property funds in March 2022 (£65k p.a. income net of costs in 2026/27).
- Forecast income levels from fees and charges in 2026/27 include increases in fees already approved (eg. Garden Waste subscriptions) together with a review of activity levels. Final fee levels will not be set until the Cabinet meeting in January 2026.
- For 2026/27 onwards, provision has been included for a reduction in costs/increase in housing benefit subsidy reclaimed of £600k relating to temporary accommodation. This is a result of various initiatives currently progressing, in conjunction with current providers and from the impact of the additional houses purchased with support from the Local Authority Housing Fund and the current capital programme.
- Recharges to Fenland Future Limited to reflect the use of FDC officer time on the company's behalf has been included (£125k in 2022/23 and future years). This amount could vary depending on the amount of time and types of activities being carried out for the company.
- Potential net benefits from Fenland Future Ltd of loan interest and dividends from future developments have been included. These amounts could vary depending on the timing and profitability of developments being carried out by the company.
- No allowance has been made in the medium term forecasts for the potential impact of the government's waste strategy particularly relating to Food Waste.
- The additional income (or costs) from the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for managing packaging waste (effective from 2025/26) has been included. Although we have been allocated £1.537k for 2025/26 and a proposal of £1,572k for 2026/27, we are not able to predict the EPR for the future years.
- £372k of in-year savings have been included in 2026/27 for potential savings from the Transformation Agenda 2 programme and 2027/28 onwards.
- Estimated financing costs (Interest and MRP) of the current capital programme as detailed in Appendix D(i) are included in the MTFs. No allowance has been made for any additional new capital schemes.

APPENDIX D(i)**CAPITAL PROGRAMME AND FUNDING 2025 - 2029**


	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
	£000	£000	£000	£000
CURRENT FORECAST EXPENDITURE	20,861	19,094	19,294	0
FORECAST RESOURCES AVAILABLE				
Capital Grants	5,996	1,494	3,694	0
Usable Capital Receipts - In Year	250	250	250	0
Reserves used in year to fund Capital	214	0	0	0
Section 106s and Other Contributions	0	0	0	0
Borrowing (Internal and Prudential) - Capital Programme	9,526	10,350	15,350	0
Borrowing (Prudential) - CIS	4,875	7,000	0	0
TOTAL FORECAST RESOURCES	20,861	19,094	19,294	0

POTENTIAL NEW CAPITAL SCHEMES 2025/26 - 2027/28										APPENDIX D(ii)
</										

EARMARKED AND GENERAL RESERVES - Revised 2025/26 and Estimated 2026/27
APPENDIX E

Reserve Name	Balance 01.04.25 £	Revenue Contributions to(+)/from(-) 2025/26 £	Capital Funding £	Revised Balance 31.03.26 £	Revenue Contributions to(+)/from(-) 2026/27 £	Capital Funding £	Estimated Balance 31.03.27 £	Comments / Conditions of Use
Travellers Sites	542,481	22,678		565,159	34,920		600,079	Can only be used for specific future maintenance liabilities.
CCTV - Plant & Equipment	61,128			61,128			61,128	Available for future CCTV maintenance & replacement liabilities.
Station Road, Whittlesey - Maintenance	16,000			16,000			16,000	Required for future road maintenance.
Management of Change	27,623	-14,400		13,223			13,223	Available for the effective management of any organisational changes required to meet the Council's future priorities.
Business Rates Equalisation Reserve	800,516			800,516			800,516	Available to assist the Council in smoothing out volatility in the business rates retention system.
Capital Contribution Reserve	116,117			116,117			116,117	Available to fund specific spending commitments in future years.
Port - Buoy Maintenance	145,798			145,798			145,798	Available for future buoy maintenance to service windfarms.
Repairs and Maintenance	808,706	-18,000		790,706			790,706	Available to provide funding for one-off schemes, not covered by the normal Repairs and Maintenance revenue budgets.
Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) - Wisbech	49,235			49,235			49,235	To manage the Heritage Lottery Funded scheme in Wisbech.
Highways Street Lighting	82,523			82,523			82,523	Available to fund future repairs and maintenance relating to street lighting.
Solid Wall Remediation	100,000			100,000			100,000	Available to fund potential costs linked to solid wall installations in the District.
Investment Strategy Reserve	1,340,168			1,340,168			1,340,168	Established to provide future funding for Commercial and Investment Strategy projects.
Budget Equalisation Reserve	2,212,647			2,212,647			2,212,647	Year-end surpluses are transferred to this reserve. If a deficit is forecast this reserve can be used to offset the expected shortfall.
Planning Reserve	663,673	244,931		908,604			908,604	Available to fund additional planning costs not reflected in the annual budget, including the development of the Local Plan.
Elections Reserve	107,832	-34,110		73,722			73,722	Available to fund four-yearly District-wide elections. Transfers are made to this reserve each year to fund the cost of the next District-wide election.
Port - Pilots Staff Development Training	11,875			11,875			11,875	Available to fund the training of maritime pilots to fulfill the authority's statutory functions.
Cambridgeshire Horizons	1,802,544	-507,570		1,294,974			1,294,974	Available for the Council's future use in accordance with the conditions attached to the receipt.
Specific Government Grants (received in previous years)	2,297,132	-385,543	-200,000	1,711,589	51,190		1,762,779	Available to fund specific spending commitments in future years.
TOTAL EARMARKED RESERVES	11,185,996	-692,014	-200,000	10,293,982	86,110	0	10,380,092	
General Fund Balance	2,000,000			2,000,000			2,000,000	Unallocated general reserve required for various and unplanned for contingencies, to mitigate risks associated with future financial planning as well as for general day to day cash flow needs.
TOTAL RESERVES	13,185,996	-692,014	-200,000	12,293,982	86,110	0	12,380,092	

NB: In accordance with the Council's Financial Rules and Scheme of Financial Delegation (Part 4, Rule 6 of the Constitution), paragraphs B57 - B60 delegates authority to the Chief Finance Officer to approve expenditure from these reserves in accordance with their approved use as detailed above.

Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Adoption of a New Planning Enforcement Policy	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 To seek approval for the adoption of a revised Planning Enforcement Policy for Fenland District Council. The updated Policy sets out how the Council will exercise its planning enforcement functions, establishes clear priorities and provides transparency for residents, developers and landowners.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Planning enforcement is a critical tool for safeguarding the integrity of the planning system and ensuring that development complies with approved permissions. Although enforcement action remains a discretionary power, the Council has a statutory responsibility to investigate alleged breaches of planning control in a thorough, fair and proportionate manner.
- 2.2 Each potential breach must be carefully evaluated to determine whether formal action is justified and expedient, balancing the need to protect public amenity, the environment and community interests against the rights of landowners and developers. This decision-making process requires a consistent and transparent framework.
- 2.3 A clear and up-to-date Planning Enforcement Policy is essential to underpin this framework. It provides the Council with a structured approach to prioritising and managing enforcement cases, sets expectations for all parties involved and ensures that resources are directed towards breaches causing the greatest harm.
- 2.4 Without a robust and well-communicated policy, the Council risks inconsistent responses, delays, and erosion of public confidence in its ability to uphold planning standards. The policy also ensures that enforcement activities comply with legal requirements and reflect best practice, supporting effective and proportionate resolution of breaches.
- 2.5 The Council last adopted a Planning Enforcement Policy in 2020. Since that time Case law, national policy and government guidance have evolved. Alongside this the Local Government Ombudsman has placed increased emphasis on transparent standards and effective investigations. New planning enforcement powers have also been introduced.
- 2.6 A full review has therefore been required to ensure that the Council's policy and processes remain fit for purpose.
- 2.7 The proposed Policy has been prepared by the Planning Service, informed by operational experience, and is aimed at providing an effective enforcement

service that ensures that the most significant and harmful breaches of planning control are appropriately prioritised and resourced.

3 Recommendations

3.1 For Cabinet to approve the revised Planning Enforcement Policy.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/28OCT25/01
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Dee Laws – Portfolio Holder for Building Control, Flooding, IDBs & Planning
Report Originator(s)	Matthew Leigh – Head of Planning
Contact Officer(s)	Matthew Leigh – Head of Planning mleigh@fenland.gov.uk Carol Pilson – Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer cpilson@fenland.gov.uk
Background Papers	Local Planning Enforcement Plan (June 2020)

Report:

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 Planning permission from the local planning authority is usually needed to undertake development (that is, to carry out building works and/or to ‘materially’ change how a property is used).
- 1.2 Failure to obtain planning permission where it is required or to adhere to conditions attached to planning permission constitutes a ‘planning breach’.
- 1.3 A local planning authority is not required to take enforcement action if it discovers planning breach. It may invite the individual or developer to submit a retrospective planning application or decide it is not expedient to take action.
- 1.4 It is up to local planning authorities whether they take enforcement action and what type of enforcement action they take. The government states that “*enforcement is important for maintaining public confidence in the planning system*” but advises local planning authorities to “*act proportionately*” in responding to planning breaches.
- 1.5 Whilst there is no statutory requirement to take enforcement action there is a requirement to investigate a complaint appropriately and to come to a balanced decision. If this is not undertaken appropriately the Council can be reasonably criticised and this could be evidenced through Ombudsman complaints being upheld, or potentially, in a worst case scenario, Judicial Reviews on decisions to not take action.

- 1.6 The Council's existing Planning Enforcement Policy was approved in June 2020. Since then, there have been significant changes in legislation, national guidance, local priorities, and public expectations. The current policy is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.7 In relation to planning enforcement policies, national guidance states:
"Effective enforcement is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system. Enforcement action is discretionary, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control. They should publish a local enforcement plan to manage enforcement proactively, in a way that is appropriate to their area. This should set out how they will monitor the implementation of planning permissions, investigate alleged cases of unauthorised development, and take action where appropriate."
- 1.8 While the current document provides a basic overview of planning enforcement matters, it is relatively lightweight in both content and structure and is better described as guidance rather than a formal policy. It lacks the necessary detail to clearly explain how the Council will determine whether to act in response to a breach of planning control, or the circumstances in which no further action will be taken. As a result, it offers limited practical guidance to officers, Members, or members of the public and does not provide the transparency or certainty that interested parties should reasonably expect from a published enforcement policy.
- 1.9 Crucially, it does not provide any clear criteria for when cases should be expedited for action or, conversely, deemed not worthy of further investigation. This lack of clarity hampers the service's ability to manage caseloads effectively and makes it more difficult to set realistic expectations with complainants, Members, and other stakeholders. As a result, the current document does not support efficient decision-making or transparent prioritisation.
- 1.10 Historically, the volume of enforcement complaints received by the Council had remained relatively consistent; however, in recent years there has been a notable increase in the number of reported cases. This rising demand has placed significant pressure on what remains a small and resource-limited team.
- 1.11 In addition, the Council experienced staffing challenges over the last couple of years that led to a marked reduction in the number of cases being progressed to conclusion, further compounding the issue.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 In light of the limitations of the current document and the importance of effective planning enforcement, the Local Planning Authority has prepared a new Planning Enforcement Policy, attached as Appendix 2, which is considered to be more robust, comprehensive, and fit for purpose. The revised policy reflects current national expectations and provides clearer direction to officers, Members, and the public.

- 2.2 It is considered that the new policy aligns more closely with this guidance, by setting out a clearer framework for investigation, prioritisation, and formal action. Due to the substantial changes in format, tone, and content, a direct comparison between the new and previous documents is not considered meaningful.
- 2.3 The Policy is designed to support a more focused and efficient service, recognising that enforcement capacity is limited. It will help manage expectations and improve case throughput by:
- Clearer prioritisation of cases based on harm, enabling more efficient use of limited resources;
 - Stronger emphasis on harm-based assessment;
 - Service standards and indicative response timescales;
 - Improved transparency and consistency in decision-making;
 - Greater clarity on the factors that will influence whether or not formal action is taken;
 - Guidance on how anonymous, persistent, or vexatious complaints will be handled;
 - Formal reference to statutory powers;
 - Stronger alignment with the principles of proportionality, expediency, and public interest; and
 - Clear references to enforcement powers and tools previously omitted, including use of Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) powers in appropriate cases.
- 2.4 The new policy is intended to better support officers in day-to-day enforcement decision-making, improve the Council's ability to defend its actions when challenged, and reinforce public trust in the planning system.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 There is no statutory requirement to undertake public consultation before adopting a new Planning Enforcement Policy. However, should be adopted the Council will notifying third parties and stakeholders we engage with on planning

enforcement matters as well as informing the members of the Developers Forum.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 **Maintaining the Existing Policy Without Revision** - This option was discounted because the current policy is outdated, lacking clarity on prioritisation and service standards and does not fully reflect recent legislative changes or best practice. The lack of clarity and precision results in officers not being able to priorities cases effectively. Continuing with the existing policy risks inconsistent decision-making and reduced public confidence, whilst officers are unable to effectively manage their workloads.
- 4.2 **The provision of a more aggressive Policy** - This option was discounted because a more aggressive enforcement stance would require significantly increased staffing and financial resources to investigate and pursue a larger volume of cases, which is not sustainable within current budgets. Planning enforcement is inherently discretionary and must be applied proportionately. Pursuing formal enforcement with limited direction increases the likelihood of appeals and legal challenges, potentially resulting in additional costs and reputational damage. A balanced approach that targets serious breaches while using informal resolution for minor issues is considered more effective and sustainable.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

- 5.2 The Planning Enforcement Policy is framed within the statutory powers and duties set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and subsequent legislation, including the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. It reflects the Council's responsibility to investigate breaches of planning control and to decide whether enforcement action is appropriate and proportionate.
- 5.3 The policy ensures that enforcement decisions are made in accordance with current planning law, relevant case law and national planning policy, including guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This alignment helps to minimise the risk of legal challenge to enforcement decisions.
- 5.4 The Policy also outlines the statutory notices and remedies available to the Council, including Enforcement Notices, Stop Notices and Breach of Condition Notices. It emphasises the need for the Council to act reasonably and fairly in all enforcement matters, respecting the rights of landowners while protecting the public interest.

5.5 Financial Implications

- 5.6 The Planning Enforcement Policy can be implemented within the Council's existing budget and staffing resources. The introduction of clearer prioritisation and streamlined procedures is expected to improve operational efficiency, enabling the Enforcement Team to focus on cases with the greatest impact and reduce time spent on low-priority or unsubstantiated complaints.
- 5.7 The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.
- 5.8 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address

5.9 Equality Implications

The Policy promotes accessibility and transparency, ensuring that all members of the community can understand the enforcement process and what to expect. It recognises the importance of clear communication and reasonable adjustments where necessary to support those with specific needs.

The revised Planning Enforcement Policy is designed to be applied fairly and consistently to all individuals and groups. There is no anticipated disproportionate adverse impact on any protected groups.

6 SCHEDULES

Appendix 1 – Local Planning Enforcement Plan
Appendix 2 – Enforcement Policy



**Local Planning
Enforcement
Plan**

June 2020

Introduction

- 1 The Council has an adopted **Corporate Enforcement Policy** which sets the general principle for dealing with investigations. The purpose of the Local Planning Enforcement Plan is to set out how the Council's Planning Compliance Team's deal with specific Planning Enforcement investigations.
- 2 Planning Compliance operates within the legislative framework of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and all its subordinate and associated legislation. Planning Policy and Guidance contained within Local Plans, the National Planning Policy Framework and the online Planning Policy Guidance ensure decisions are open, consistent and fair.
- 3 The Planning Compliance Team must also comply with the law in the way it conducts its investigations under the Regulation of Investigation Powers Act (RIPA) and the Police and Crime Evidence Act (PACE). The Council has an adopted a **RIPA Policy**.

Effect Enforcement

- 4 The Planning Policy Guidance for planning enforcement emphasises that:-
'Effective enforcement is important to:
 - tackle breaches of planning control which would otherwise have unacceptable impact on the amenity of the area;
 - maintain the integrity of the decision-making process;
 - help ensure that public acceptance of the decision-making process is maintained.'
- 5 An essential part of delivering effective planning enforcement is the adoption of a Local Planning Enforcement Policy. The policy:-
 - allows engagement in the process of defining objectives and priorities which are tailored to local circumstances;
 - sets out the priorities for enforcement action, which will inform decisions about when to take enforcement action;
 - provides greater transparency and accountability about how the local planning authority will decide if it is expedient to exercise its discretionary powers;
 - provides greater certainty for all parties engaged in the development process.

Purpose of the Planning Compliance Team

- 6 The purpose of the Planning Compliance Team is to protect the public and the environment from development that would cause harm and to ensure that the objectives of the planning system as a whole are not undermined. It is not the case that Planning compliance exists to 'punish' people who are responsible for a breach of planning control, but to prevent and remedy any harm caused. Any action taken by the Council has to be expedient and proportionate to the breach in question.
- 7 Someone who raises concerns about development is referred to as the informant. Their concerns will be investigated and they will either be reassured that what has been done is what the owner/occupier is permitted to do or entitled to do lawfully, or what action will be required to remedy the unauthorised development.
- 8 A person responsible for undertaking development will be known as the responsible person. This could be the developer, owner or occupier of the land and buildings. They will be informed as to whether they have breached planning controls or not, or whether an offence has been committed or not, and what they need to do to put it right. We will use deadlines to monitor the progress towards remedying a breach. If the agreed deadlines are not met without reason or explanation we will consider more formal action.
- 9 Unless the unauthorised development or works are completely unacceptable and the harm caused incapable of being mitigated, we will try to resolve all breaches of planning control through negotiations. We will invite a planning application to regularise the breach, which may take some time to submit, depending on the issues and/or evidence required to support the proper consideration of the application. For example, an application for a conservatory could be submitted within a few weeks where as an application for a business where an acoustic report is required could take a few months.

A Breach or a Criminal Offence

- 10 The following constitute a **breach of planning control**:
 - the carrying out of development (building works or a material change of use) without the required planning permission, or;
 - Development not completed in accordance with approved plans, or;
 - Failure to comply with conditions attached to planning permission.

11 The following works constitute a **criminal offence**.

- unauthorised works to Listed Buildings,
- substantial demolition in a Conservation Area,
- unauthorised works to trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders or tree within a designated Conservation Area, and;
- advertisements displayed without consent,
- Failure to comply with the requirements of an Enforcement Notice, Breach of Condition Notice or S. 215 Amenity Notice
- The Breach of an Injunction

In such circumstances, the seriousness of the offence is likely to dictate the nature of the response. The more serious the more likely the defendant will find themselves facing proceedings in Courts.

How we deal with allegations

12 If you have any concerns about development you should contact the Council:

By Letter

Fenland District Council
Planning Compliance
County Road
March
Cambridgeshire
PE15 8NQ

By Telephone,
(01354) 654321

By Email
Planningenforcement@fenland.gov.uk

By the Council's website
www.fenland.gov.uk

13 All concerns about development must be accompanied by the full name contact details such as address, phone number or email address. The informant's details are kept strictly confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone outside of the Authority and will only be disclosed to officers within the Authority who have the appropriate authorisation.

- 14 We will not deal with anonymous complaints. This is to discourage vexatious complaints and there may be occasions where we need the informant to provide additional information on what they have witnessed, which is especially relevant to alleged changes of use.

For example, where car repair and maintenance takes place we cannot monitor the site 24/7 and will need a log to provide details of the extent of the use such as number of cars, frequency and what works are witnessed.

- 15 Where concerns are received, we will create a file and research will be undertaken which includes checking ownership, the planning history, legislation and contact details of the responsible person.
- a) The informant will receive an acknowledgement of their concerns within seven days of the date this is received.
 - b) Where the allegation involves development that appears to have serious harm to the environment or to amenity, or a criminal offence, a site visit will take place within five days of the date of the issue being brought to our attention. Where harm arising is immediate and of sufficient significance the site will be visited immediately. In all other cases a site visit will take place within fourteen days.
 - c) Officers will determine whether a breach of planning control has taken place.
 - i) *Where a Breach is found and causes little harm*
 - We will invite the responsible person to submit a retrospective application (1st Challenge letter). They will be given 21 days to confirm what they will do to remedy the situation and we will then agree deadlines to be met specific objectives, such as submitting an application.
 - If an application is not received by the agreed deadline the Council will decide whether it is expedient to take further action.

(an appeal against a Planning Enforcement Notice where the responsible person wants retrospective planning permission is **twice** the fee of a planning application).
 - ii) *Where a breach is found and causes harm that can be controlled or reduced to acceptable levels through conditions or works to remedy the situation.*

- We will invite the owner to submit a retrospective application (1st Challenge letter). They will be given 21 days to confirm what they will do and we will agree deadlines for steps to be taken, such as the submission of a planning application.
- If no steps are taken by the agreed deadline, a second reminder letter will be sent giving the responsible person 14 days to explain the delay and to agree further deadlines.

(an appeal against a Planning Enforcement Notice where the responsible person wants retrospective planning permission is **twice** the fee of a planning application).

- If the agreed deadline is not met following the 2nd Challenge, a **Planning Contravention Notice (PCN)** will be served as a prelude to more formal action.

(a PCN requires the person who receives it to answer questions about the unauthorised development. It is necessary to establish the facts before the service of a more formal Notice)

iii) Where a Breach found and is causing significant issues and there is no apparent solution a more robust approach will be taken.

- The responsible person will be informed of the breach and that it is unlikely to receive planning permission with an explanation as to why. We will then agree a date by which they should cease the unauthorised use and/or remove any unauthorised works.
- We cannot refuse to accept a planning application if one is submitted.
- If they fail to meet the agreed deadline, a **Planning Contravention Notice (PCN)** will be served as a prelude to more formal action.

- 16 Any retrospective application will be assessed in accordance with the Council's established procedures, as with any planning application. We consult neighbours with shared boundaries in accordance with the Council policies and procedures. If the informant is not a neighbour then they may

not be consulted on the application as this may identify them. Our first objective would be to maintain the confidentiality of the informant unless their written consent is received to do otherwise. The Local Plan Policies and other supplementary Guidance can be found using the following link:

<https://www.fenland.gov.uk/planningpolicy>

- 17 If a retrospective planning application is not received, the Council will have to decide whether it is expedient to take formal action. The online Planning Policy Guidance is clear that:-

'Nothing in this guidance should be taken as condoning a wilful breach of planning law. Enforcement action should, however, be proportionate to the breach of planning control to which it relates and taken when it is expedient to do so. Where the balance of public interest lies will vary from case to case.'

The guidance goes on to state that Councils should avoid taking action in the following circumstances:-

- *there is a trivial or technical breach of control which causes no material harm or adverse impact on the amenity of the site or the surrounding area;*
- *development is acceptable on its planning merits and formal enforcement action would solely be to regularise the development;*
- *in their assessment, the local planning authority consider that an application is the appropriate way forward to regularise the situation, for example, where [planning conditions may need to be imposed](#).*

However, the failure to have the relevant planning permission could result in substantial cost and delay when the property is for sale. Planning Applications and application for Certificate of Lawfulness can take eight weeks or more to determine.

- 18 Those that submit retrospective planning applications or receive Planning Enforcement Notices have a right of appeal to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate. In such cases the Council has no control over the time taken to deal with the matter and it can take several months for the Appeal to be determined.

- 19 Where a criminal offence has occurred;
- i) The responsible person will be informed of the offence and what action will be taken against them. Any action will be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence they have committed.
 - ii) A responsible person may be invited to the Council offices to do an Interviewed under Caution. The responsible person should seek their own legal advice or representation in the circumstances. The interview will be taped, where such equipment is available.
 - ii) Depending on the seriousness of the offence, one of two options will be available to the Council.
 - 1) Minor matter causing minimal harm –

The offender may be offered a ‘caution’ which will stay on record for two years and may be brought to the courts attention if future offences are committed.
 - 2) Major Offence causing significant harm –

The offender may be prosecuted in the courts or injunction proceedings taken.
- 20 Following any conviction or where matters are so serious in their impact, the Council can take Injunction Proceedings or Direct action (where the Council does the works in default).
- 21 There are a number of Notices that can be served depending on the seriousness of the breach of planning control, which are listed below:-

Stop Notice

These are used in the most serious of cases, where harm to amenity and the character of the land are severe.

Temporary Stop Notice

These are used to stop the unauthorised use whilst the Council considers the most appropriate course of action. These are used where harm to amenity and the character of the land are substantial.

Planning Enforcement Notice (EN)

These are used either on their own, or in serious case, in conjunction with a Stop Notice. The Notice will tell you what you have done wrong and what you need to do to put it right. There is a right of Appeal against the Notice.

Breach of Condition Notice (BoCN)

Where a planning permission has been given conditionally for development, a BoCN can be used to ensure conditions are complied with. There is no right of appeal against the Notice.

Injunctions

The Council can use injunction proceedings to restrain a breach of planning control, but only where harm to amenity and the character of the land are severe.

Keeping People Informed

- 22 All reports of planning breaches are taken seriously and we will keep you informed of any key stages in the investigation. We do provide contact details and you can contact officers for an update on progress during normal office hours.
- 23 Please note that some investigations can take some time so you may not hear from the planning compliance team on a regular basis, but as aforementioned, you are able to contact the case officer during normal working hours for an update at any time.

Terms

- 24 Proportionate

Where the punishment/requirements are balanced against the seriousness of the offences /harm that is being caused.

Expediency

The reasons for taking action are considered carefully, with an assessment of the effects of the unauthorised development such as the harm caused to individuals or the wider community and/ or against policy objectives weighed against the benefits of the development.

Informant

The person or persons who have raised their concerns over development with the Council

The Responsible person

The person or persons responsible for the unauthorised development and/or offence that has/have been committed. This may be the owners, occupiers or developers.

Development

This is either a material change of use or operational development (buildings and structures), or a mixture of both as defined by Section 55 of the Town & Country Planning Act (1990) (as amended).

Permitted Development

These are rights given to developer, owner and occupiers to undertake works and changes of use so long as they are in accordance with the criteria as set out in the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (as amended)

Useful Websites

- 25 The following site contains useful information and advice.

<https://www.fenland.gov.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate>

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents>

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Fenland District Council is committed to maintaining the integrity of the local planning system. Effective enforcement seeks to ensure that development is carried out in accordance with planning permissions and that unauthorised development, which is likely to cause harm to the environment or local amenity, is appropriately addressed.
- 1.2 The Local Enforcement Plan for Fenland is produced by the Council in accordance with, and to directly reflect the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to outline the Council's approach to planning enforcement, ensuring transparency, consistency, and fairness in handling breaches of planning control.
- 1.3 It is at the discretion of the Council as to whether it would be necessary, in the public interest, for it to take formal enforcement action. The objective of planning enforcement is about compliance, not punishment. Many breaches of planning control can be resolved effectively through negotiation without the necessity of resorting to enforcement action. Nevertheless, the Council views the disregard for the planning regulations a serious matter and where it is deemed appropriate and expedient, proportionate action shall be taken.
- 1.4 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (the Act) provides the legislative framework for dealing with breaches of planning control. The Act provides the Council with the necessary powers to deal with breaches of planning control whilst the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), provides guidance on how the Council should deal with breaches of planning control and other enforcement matters.
- 1.5 Three important points must be made:
 - It is not an offence to carry out development without first obtaining planning permission (except in certain instances – see paragraph 3.9).
 - The taking of enforcement action and serving a notice is not an instantaneous remedy to unauthorised development.

- The taking of enforcement action cannot be used to require the submission of a planning application.

1.6 There are various ways that the Council can enforce planning control, and they should always act in a proportionate way. The NPPF and NPPG make it clear that the powers provided by the Act are discretionary and should only be used when it is expedient to do so. Any action taken should be commensurate with the seriousness of the breach of planning control and the harm caused or harm that may be caused.

1.7 Paragraph 60 of the NPPF states:

"Effective enforcement is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system. Enforcement action is discretionary, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control. They should consider publishing a local enforcement plan to manage enforcement proactively, in a way that is appropriate to their area. This should set out how they will monitor the implementation of planning permissions, investigate alleged cases of unauthorised development and take action where appropriate."

1.8 The Council adopts a firm but fair approach to the investigation of planning enforcement matters. We seek to strike a sensible balance between the need for effective control and the need to be reasonable and proportionate in our response to such matters.

2 **The Aims of Planning Enforcement in Fenland**

2.1 The Council aims to provide an efficient, effective and timely planning enforcement service within the resources available, whilst treating our customers with courtesy, respect and fairness. We will seek to operate our service in accordance with service standards and performance targets. We will regularly review these standards taking account of the views of customers and stakeholders.

- 2.2 The Council aims to remedy the undesirable effect of unauthorised development and to strike a balance between protecting amenity/environment and other interests. This Plan seeks to promote efficient and effective approaches to the investigation of enforcement matters which, in turn, improves outcomes without imposing unnecessary burdens on individuals or businesses.
- 2.3 The Council will, when it is considered appropriate and proportionate to do so, take a robust approach to enforcing against confirmed breaches of planning control.
- 2.4 The Council is committed to delivering enforcement services that comply with national standards within the Regulators' Compliance Code. The Council has adopted a Corporate Enforcement Policy that sets out the Council's approach to bring about compliance with the regulatory requirements it enforces. The aims and principles set out in these codes are intended to ensure:
- Openness about how we carry out our work;
 - Helpfulness in terms of providing advice and assistance;
 - Proportionality i.e. any action we take will be proportionate to the harm caused by the breach; and,
 - Consistency i.e. our duties will be carried out in a fair and consistent manner.

3 What is a Breach of Planning Control?

- 3.1 A breach of planning control is defined as the carrying out of development without the required planning permission or failing to comply with any condition or limitation subject to which planning permission has been granted.
- 3.2 Planning enforcement action can only be considered where the development has taken place and it involves a breach of planning control: i.e. planning permission, Listed Building Consent or advertisement consent would be required but has not been secured. In addition, an important consideration is whether the development is causing or has resulted in planning 'harm'.
- 3.3 'Development' is defined in Section 55 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, it means the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land.
- 3.4 Certain types of development can be carried out as 'permitted development'; this means that planning permission from the Council is not required. Determining whether a planning permission from the Council is required in such circumstances depends on several factors and these are detailed in the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 (As amended).
- 3.5 Breaches of planning control (unauthorised development) can sometimes cause serious harm to the way people live or to the environment. A key objective of the Planning Enforcement Service is that harmful activities are dealt with effectively where it is expedient to do so. However, it is important to note that any action taken by the Council to rectify a breach of planning control must be proportionate and carried out in a fair, balanced and impartial way.
- 3.6 Planning laws are designed to control development and the use of land and buildings in the wider public interest. They are not meant to protect the private interests of one person or party over another.
- 3.7 Examples of breaches of planning control include:

- Carrying out of operational development (building or other works) without the required planning permission.
- Unauthorised material change of use of land or buildings.
- Failure to comply with the conditions attached to a planning permission.
- Untidy land that has a serious adverse impact on local amenity.
- Failure to comply with Section 106 Agreements/undertakings.
- Unauthorised works to listed buildings.
- Unauthorised display of advertisements.
- Not building in accordance with the approved plans (following the granting of planning permission).
- Unauthorised works to a protected tree.

3.8 Examples of activity that are unlikely to result in a breach of planning control include:

- Internal alterations to a building which is not a listed building.
- Obstruction of a highway or public right of way.
- Land ownership disputes and boundary disagreements.
- Parking of vehicles on the highway or on grass verges.
- Operating a business from home, where the residential use remains the primary use of the property and there is no significant impact on the residential amenity or the character of the area.
- Covenants and restrictions on Deeds and Land Registry enquiries.
- Any development already approved by the government and therefore deemed to be "Permitted Development" by virtue of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015

3.9 Most breaches of planning control are not, in themselves, criminal offences. Under current legislation a criminal offence arises when an Enforcement Notice has been served, has taken effect and the requirements of such a notice have not been complied with in the time required within the notice. There are also a number of breaches of planning control that do constitute a criminal offence from the outset. Such breaches include:

- Unauthorised works to a Listed Building.
- Unauthorised works to a Protected Tree or tree within a Conservation Area.
- The unauthorised display of Advertisements.

3.10 Under the provisions of the Act, a time limit is placed upon a local planning authority to take enforcement action. The time limit is ten years from when an unauthorised operational development is substantially completed, a material change of use commences or when any other breach of planning control begins. If evidence proves, on the balance of probability, that the above limits are met, the development would be immune from enforcement action.

4 How We Prioritise Complaints

4.1 The Council receives a high number of new planning enforcement complaints every year. Because of the often lengthy and complex nature of planning investigations and limits on resources, it is necessary to give priority to those cases where the greatest harm is being or, is likely to be, caused. Individual cases may be reprioritised as an investigation progresses where new and relevant information comes to light.

4.2 Complaints classified as '**Category A**' – High priority investigations.

This applies where the breach relates to unauthorised development which poses a serious threat to the environment or public amenity, for example, by causing a serious traffic hazard, or it poses permanent damage to the environment, for example, unauthorised work affecting a Listed Building or the loss of a protected tree.

In such circumstances a member of the planning service will visit the site as soon as practicable (usually within 48 hours) after the receipt of the enquiry to identify the appropriate course of action, if necessary, which could be commencing injunctive or legal proceedings or issuing statutory Notices. High priority cases can include

- Works to listed buildings.
- Works to protected trees.
- Demolition of important unlisted buildings in conservation areas.
- Significant unauthorised building works.
- Breach of conditions where there is likely to be irreversible harm.
- Existing cases that are subject to appeal deadlines or Court proceedings.
- Vulnerable development in Flood Zone 1 that could endanger members of the public.

4.3 Complaints classified as '**Category B**' – Medium priority investigations.

Cases where the breach of planning control relates to development which is clearly contrary to the Development Plan and is unlikely to be granted planning permission without modification or removal, for example, development in Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the open countryside or Conservation Areas.

Officers will endeavour to visit the development and contact the relevant owners and developers as soon as possible (usually within 15 working days of the receipt of the complaint) to discuss the matter and negotiate a solution.

Formal enforcement action will generally only be considered if negotiations and measures taken to remedy the issues fail to address any significant harm arising from the development. Examples of medium priority cases include:

- Councillor or MP complaints and formal Parish Council complaints.
- Unauthorised built development or material changes of use causing significant harm to residential amenity, highway safety, the environment or on the wider community.
- Operational development within conservation areas.
- Where immunity rules are likely to shortly apply if action is not taken.

4.4 Complaints classified as '**Category C**' – Low priority investigations.

These are breaches of planning control and unauthorised developments which give limited rise to problems that may be simply resolved. For example, small domestic works, by imposing conditions on a planning approval, where the complaint relates to untidy land or buildings and simple breaches of conditions on existing planning permissions. Such cases also include matters that would be granted unconditional planning permission on the submission of an application.

In these circumstances, Officers will endeavour to visit and seek to contact the owners and developers within 30 working days of the receipt of the enquiry.

Officers will give advice on what measures are required to address the issues and give a reasonable timescale (usually within 30 working days of the meeting) for them to carry out any necessary remedial work or submit a planning application to rectify the matter. Examples of these cases include:

- Technical breaches of planning control where there is no significant conflict with objectives of the policies of the adopted development plan.
- Breaches of planning control that would be recommended for unconditional approval if a regularising application were submitted.
- Temporary breaches of planning control that will resolve themselves without formal action.
- Display of advertisements and other small minor developments such as satellite dishes, in most instances.

4.5 There will be occasions, albeit seldom, where the Planning Enforcement Service receives a complaint that is exceptional and requires greater engagement of officers' time and resources. Examples of such are sites that are subject to a significant number of different unauthorised developments and complicated material changes of use, sites with complex planning history requiring extensive investigation, breaches that require legal advice and sites that generate a significant amount of public interest. In the event of such cases being reported, resources will have to be allocated accordingly, as these cases are likely to require additional time to fully investigate and to progress.

4.6 In order to give the best possible service and to manage the limited resources within the Council, there are some cases that will not be investigated. These include:

- Neighbour disputes – Unless clear planning issues are identified.
- Anonymous complaints – Unless what is alleged is a priority level Category A breach of planning control.
- Trade complaints – Unless clear planning issues are identified.

- Business uses from residential properties where no evidence is provided
 - In line with Public Protection procedures, a log sheet will be sent out to the informant to record times, dates, activities and impacts prior to such cases being formally investigated, usually for a period of at least 28 days. Once the log sheets have been returned to the Council with sufficient information, the case would then be formally investigated.
- Complaints that would appear, from the information provided, to fall under a different legislative framework e.g. Environmental Health or the Highway Authority. In such cases, where possible, the complaint will be passed onto the relevant service area.
- Issues that are clearly not planning related e.g. matters regarding deeds or covenants, boundary disputes, torts of trespass etc.

5 Complainings to the Council

- 5.1 All initial complaints are dealt with in confidence and the details of the complainants will not be made known without their agreement. However, the substance of the complaints themselves is not confidential. In some cases, it may be necessary to rely on evidence from complainants to enable the Council to take enforcement action and the complainant will need to consider whether they are willing to actively assist the Council by collecting evidence and/or acting as a witness at an appeal or in Court.
- 5.2 If someone believes that a breach of planning control has occurred, the best way to notify the Council's Planning Enforcement Service is by using the Council's online breach of planning control reporting form which can be found at <https://www.fenland.gov.uk/article/15187/Report-a-breach-of-planning-control>.
- 5.3 Anonymous complaints will not be investigated. If complainants do not wish to give their personal details, they will be advised to contact either their Local Ward Councillor or their Parish Council who may be prepared to contact the Planning Enforcement Service on their behalf.

6 Engaging with the Customer

6.1 Customers of the Planning Enforcement Service will be kept informed as the case progresses, especially as enforcement cases can be lengthy. The complainant will be advised of significant case developments by the investigating officer and normally this will be when a material event occurs in the investigation (i.e. where a breach has been identified and what the most appropriate remedy/action has been considered; or alternatively no breach has occurred or identified on the basis of the available information). Officers will endeavour to keep complainants informed as follows:

- All complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt.
- In Category A cases, a site visit will be undertaken, and the Council will try to advise the complainant of how it intends to deal with the matter within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. However, due to the complexity of such cases, it may not be possible at this stage to state what action can be taken.
- In Category B cases, officers will endeavour to respond within 25 working days of receiving the complaint.
- For non-urgent cases, a response or update will normally be provided within 40 working days.
- Further updates on cases will be sent when significant progress or steps are made in a case thereafter. Unfortunately, sometimes pressures on the limited resources within the Planning Enforcement Service mean that prompt updates and records of progress of ongoing investigations is not always possible.

6.2 It is important for customers to understand the process, procedures and remit of enforcement. There is a need to match the customers' expectations with what the Planning Enforcement Service can deliver. To address this the Council will look to explain planning enforcement and the compliance process and how it refers to their case whenever possible.

6.3 All customers, including complainants and the developer, individual or business that has allegedly breached planning control, will be informed when the case has been resolved. The resolution of a case means:

- The case has been investigated and there is no breach of planning control; or
- There is a breach of planning control which has been remedied, either by the submission of an application, or the works have been removed, or use has ceased; or
- There is a breach of planning control, but it is not considered expedient to pursue the matter any further; or
- A remedial notice has been issued.

6.4 When a remedial notice has been issued, there will be a compliance period within which the contravener is required to carry out steps remedy the identified breach. The length of compliance period varies depending on the nature, severity, scale and complexity of the breach.

6.5 In some circumstances the recipient of a notice has the right of appeal which will be decided by a third party, such as the Planning Inspectorate or the Courts, who may uphold or dismiss the requirements of the notice. This part of the process has an indeterminate timescale, as it follows processes determined by bodies outside of the Local Planning Authority (Planning Inspectorate/Judiciary). The complainant will be kept updated with all processes and procedures at this stage, although they may have to correspond directly with the third-party body.

7 Enforcement Investigation Outcomes

- 7.1 On receipt of a legitimate complaint, it will be prioritised (A, B or C), and a preliminary desktop investigation will be carried out, after which a site inspection will be carried out where it is deemed necessary. Following the initial investigation, the findings will be assessed, and a view taken on how the investigation will then proceed in line with the timescales given above.
- 7.2 When the breach of planning control is determined to be causing serious harm or nuisance, or likely to cause irreparable harm and damage to buildings and land, consideration of formal action will not be delayed by protracted negotiations or a request for the submission of a planning application when it is obvious that it would not be supported and a refusal is likely to be the outcome. Similarly, if a point is reached in an investigation where the instigation of formal enforcement action is considered appropriate, proportionate and expedient, a decision will be taken in a timely manner.
- 7.3 Formal enforcement action is a last resort and those responsible for a breach of planning control will normally be given the opportunity to remedy the breach, by removing the unauthorised development or submitting an application seeking to retain it.
- 7.4 The table below offers a summary of what actions the Council will consider taking according to the status of the investigation:

Status of the Investigation	The Council's Actions
No breach of planning control has been identified.	The Council will write to the complainant to advise them of our findings and the investigation will be closed.
A breach of planning control has been identified, but it is considered that it would not be expedient to take action.	The Council will write to the person responsible for the breach of planning control and explain why the works/use require planning

	<p>permission and provide advice on how that permission can be obtained. The Council expects a planning application to be submitted within 28 days. The Council will write to the complainant to advise them of its findings and provide an explanation as to why no action will be taken in this instance. The investigation will be closed.</p>
<p>A breach of planning control has been identified and retrospective planning application seeking planning permission may regularise the breach.</p>	<p>The Council will write to the person responsible for the breach of planning control and explain why the works/use require planning permission and provide advice on how that permission can be obtained. The Council expects a planning application to be submitted within 28 days. If an application is not submitted, the Council will decide whether it would be expedient to take enforcement action.</p>
<p>A breach of planning control has been identified and the matter needs to be addressed.</p>	<p>The Council will write to the complainant to advise them of its findings. The Council will also write to the person(s) responsible for the breach to advise them what steps they need to take to address the breach of planning control and the timescales within which those steps must be taken. The Council will also</p>

	advise of the consequences of not complying with those steps.
Further investigation is required.	The Council will write to the complainant to advise them of its initial findings. The Council will write to the person(s) responsible for the breach to advise of the information that it needs. This may involve issuing a Planning Contravention Notice (PCN) which must be completed and returned to us within 21 days.
Formal Enforcement Action	<p>Where it has been established that a breach of planning control has occurred, planning harm is being caused, and the developer fails to remedy the breach, the Council will consider using statutory notices to take action to remedy the breach. The issuing of a notice is discretionary and will only be used when it is considered expedient to do so. Any action taken must be proportionate to the breach of planning control and may include 'under enforcement'.</p> <p>The complainant will be notified of the Council's decision, whatever that may be. If the decision is to take formal action, the complainant will be notified upon service of the notice.</p>

Prosecution	<p>Where the Council has served a statutory notice (including a PCN) in an attempt to remedy the breach of planning control and the required action has not been undertaken, where it is considered to be in the public interest, the Council will take appropriate legal action.</p> <p>The authority will seek full recovery of costs, where possible in these instances.</p>
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7.5 It should be noted that although “the taking of further enforcement action” is defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to mean the issue of an Enforcement Notice or the service of a Breach of Condition Notice, enforcement action in regard to this Plan includes the service of other Notices used to elicit information and the use of other enforcement powers:

7.6 Gathering Information

During a planning enforcement investigation, it is often necessary to gather the details of the owners of the land, any person with an interest in the land and/or details relating to the alleged breach of planning control being investigated, using one of three methods:

Planning Contravention Notices

The use of Planning Contravention Notices (PCN) is primarily investigative and enables the Council to gather facts and information in respect of alleged breaches of Planning Law when it “appears” that a breach may have occurred.

Section 330 Notices

These notices allow the Council to require from a person as to the nature of their interest in the land, the purpose of the use of the land, when the use

began, details of anyone having used the land for that purpose and when activities began.

Section 16 Notice (Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976)

These notices are not often used in the line of enforcement investigations. They are similar to section 330 notices in the information, although they cannot seek details of use or activity.

7.7 Enforcement Warning Notice

An enforcement warning notice formalises the process for a local planning authority to invite a retrospective planning application where it is considered that the unauthorised development has a reasonable prospect of being acceptable in planning terms, more than likely subject to conditions.

The notice will set out the matters that appear to be a breach of planning control and state that, unless an application is made by a specified date, further enforcement action may be taken. There is no power to compel the developer of the unauthorised development to apply, this is only a warning that, in the absence of an application, enforcement action will be considered.

7.8 Enforcement Notice

An Enforcement Notice may require a wide range of steps to be taken to make a development comply with the terms of a planning permission or for removing or alleviating any injury to amenity caused by the unauthorised development. There is a right of appeal against the service of an Enforcement Notice to the Planning Inspectorate.

7.9 Breach of Condition Notice

Where there has been a failure to comply with the requirements of a condition attached to a planning permission the authority may choose to serve a Breach of Condition Notice (BCN).

7.10 Stop Notice

When the effects of unauthorised activity are seriously detrimental, a Stop Notice can be used to ensure that the unauthorised activity does not continue should an appeal be lodged against the Enforcement Notice. There is no right of appeal against a Stop Notice. A Stop Notice must be served at the same time as an Enforcement Notice or thereafter, but it may not be served where the Enforcement Notice has taken effect.

7.11 Temporary Stop Notice

Where a local planning authority considers that there has been a breach of planning control and it is necessary in order to safeguard the amenity of the area that the activity that amounts to the breach should stop immediately, they may issue a Temporary Stop Notice.

7.12 Section 215 (Untidy Land) Notice

The local planning authority can investigate complaints of untidy land and buildings. They have the power to issue a notice under section 215 of the Act, to seek remedial works to 'tidy' land and buildings, if the amenity of an area is being adversely affected by the condition of land. There is a provision for the owner or occupier of the land appeal against a s215 notice to a Magistrates' Court.

7.13 Prosecutions

Failure to comply with any requirement of a statutory Notice is a criminal offence. There are a number of options available to the Council depending on the harm caused and the circumstances of the case, although prosecution is generally the most common form of initial further action.

7.14 Direct Action/Action in Default

Provision is made in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), for the Council to take 'Direct Action' to enter the land and remedy the

problem, if the requirements of a Notice served have not been complied with. Direct Action will only be taken after consultation with and authorisation from the Council's Planning Committee.

7.15 Injunctions

Legal powers are available for the local authority to apply to the Courts for an injunction to restrain an actual or alleged breach of planning control.

8 Other Planning Enforcement Powers

- 8.1 Some breaches of planning control are the subject of separate legislative codes. Investigations of breaches of planning control under these legislative codes will broadly be undertaken in accordance with the Plan where appropriate.
- 8.2 At times it may be appropriate to act under these powers without any prior warning of the Councils' intention to do so.

Listed Building Control

The Council attaches particular importance in ensuring that any alterations to Listed Buildings are properly authorised. The statutory provisions for the preservation of buildings of special architectural or historical interest are contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It is a criminal offence under Section 9 of the Act to carry out unauthorised works to a listed building which would affect its character.

- 8.3 The owner of a listed building or those who have an interest in the property or who have carried out the works may be prosecuted by the Council irrespective of whether consent is later obtained for the works, or that the unauthorised works are later made satisfactory. A person found guilty of an offence may be liable to a fine and/or a term of imprisonment. There is no time limit upon the District Council to pursue listed building enforcement action.
- 8.4 A Listed Building Enforcement Notice may also be served requiring remedial works to the building within a certain time scale. There is a right of appeal but failure to comply with the Notice is a criminal offence, .

Advertisements

The display of advertisements is controlled under the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (part C) Penalty Notices for Graffiti and Fly Posting.

- 8.5 Any person who displays an advertisement, without the relevant consent, is acting illegally and is committing an offence. Where there is sufficient

evidence, the Council could, if deemed necessary, seek prosecution of those persons deemed to display the unauthorised advertisement under the provisions of Section 224 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

- 8.6 Unless the offence is particularly flagrant or repeated, the Council may not initially consider it necessary to prosecute for an advertisement offence. Instead, we may invite the advertiser to apply for the consent they need, and, if refused, there will be a right of appeal the decision. Displays of an advert after consent has been refused, and any appeal dismissed will, subject to satisfactory evidence being obtained, result in prosecution.
- 8.7 The Council also has power under the Anti-social, Crime and Behaviour Act 2014 regarding graffiti and fly-posting. The carrying out of these acts are defined as an offence and a Penalty Notice can be served. 14 days' notice is required to be given of any such impending action. This type of action is generally considered more appropriate in circumstances where there is an extensive problem of illegal fly posting campaigns. The Planning Enforcement Service will work with colleagues in the Council's Streetscene Team in appropriate cases.

Unauthorised Works to Protected Trees

Under Section 198 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, a local planning authority has the right to make provision for the preservation of trees in their area by issuing a Tree Preservation Order. Any unauthorised works to such protected trees is an offence under Section 210 of the Act. It is an offence to cut down, uproot or wilfully destroy a tree, or wilfully damage, top or lop a tree in such a manner as to likely destroy it.

- 8.8 Trees in Conservation Areas are similarly protected subject to them being of such a size that they fall within the definition of a tree and, under Section 211 and Section 212 of the Act, similar penalties apply where unauthorised works are carried out.

Hedgerows

8.9 Section 7 of the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 makes the removal of certain hedgerows without Local Authority consent, an offence (subject to a number of exceptions).

8.10 Land Adversely Affecting the Amenity of an Area – Untidy Sites

Under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the local planning authority may take steps to require land or buildings to be tidied up when its condition adversely affects the amenity of an area. The Council may serve a notice on the owner and occupier of the land requiring steps to be taken within a specified period.

8.11 The notice takes effect after 28 days from date of service. There is a right of appeal to the Magistrates Court and then to the Crown Court, during which time the notice is of no effect. If an appeal is unsuccessful, or there is no appeal, the notice then takes effect and it is an offence not to carry out the steps required. If the notice is not complied with, the Council may consider prosecution proceedings or they may enter the land and carry out the required works. The reasonable costs incurred in carrying out the works will be recovered from the owner of the land.

8.12 The Council also have powers under Environmental Health legislation that can also be used to resolve untidy site problems. The Planning Enforcement Service will normally liaise with other sections within the Council to ensure that the most appropriate and effective remedy is sought.

8.13 The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA) sets out the legislative framework for the recovery of criminal assets with criminal confiscation being the most commonly used power. Confiscation occurs after a conviction has taken place. The aim of the asset recovery schemes in POCA is to deny criminals the use of their assets, recover the proceeds of crime and to deter criminality.


8.14 Consideration will be given to the appropriateness and expediency of the use of POCA powers, including but not limited to the seeking of confiscation orders, in appropriate cases in which a defendant has benefited from criminal conduct or a criminal lifestyle.

9 Review of the Enforcement Plan

9.1 In common with most formal documents, regular reviews of this Enforcement Plan will be necessary to ensure its status remains current, within the framework of the most up-to-date legislation and guidance issued by Government.

9.2 Reviews will take place when:

- Current legislation and/or guidance changes or;
- Comments received from residents, customers, businesses and visitors to the District can improve how the Plan is being developed and used.
- In any case, every two years.

Agenda Item No:	8	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Pride In Place Impact Fund – project proposal	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 Fenland District Council has been awarded £1.5 million from the Government's Pride in Place Impact Fund to support capital funded initiatives across the district. Building on the previous report in November to accept this funding, this report proposes the project to receive this funding over the coming 16 months.
- 1.2 Following an initial discussion with elected Members, and a review of the Fenland Inspire! projects within the Council's Business Plan, the recommended use for the funding is to enhance open spaces facilities and play areas across the district in line with the Fenland Inspire! project aims.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 The Pride in Place Impact Fund is a government initiative aimed at enhancing local pride, improving public spaces, and supporting community-led regeneration.
- 2.2 As detailed in the last paper to November Cabinet, the first payment of £750,000 is expected to be received in November 2025 with the final payment of £750,000 being received in April 2026, following FDC's formal acceptance of the funding in November.
- 2.3 To facilitate project delivery in a timely manner – as stipulated by Government - it is necessary to add a part-time, fixed term member of staff to deliver this project, as current staffing capacity will not allow effective project delivery within the timeframe available.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the allocation of the £1.5 million Pride in Place Impact Fund allocation to the delivery of improved open spaces and play park enhancements across the district.
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Open Spaces and Inspire! Projects, to commence an assessment of open spaces facilities and play parks to identify, alongside local elected Members, sites for improved or new facilities and return to Cabinet with a report with recommendations on the specific projects to be undertaken.

- 3.3 That Cabinet notes the necessary recruitment of a part-time, fixed term contract Project Officer to ensure that the organisation has the capacity to deliver this work in a timely manner, within the tight timeframe and deadline of March 2027 stipulated by Government.

Wards Affected	All	
Forward Plan Reference	KEY/13NOV25/02	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton	Portfolio Holder for Fenland Inspire! projects
	Cllr Jan French	Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Open Spaces
	Cllr Chris Boden	Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originators	Phil Hughes Matt Wright	Head of Leisure and Open Spaces Regeneration Programme Manager
Contact Officers	Phil Hughes Kevin Wilkins	Head of Leisure and Open Spaces Open Spaces Contract Manager
Background Papers	November 2025 Cabinet Report Pride in Place Impact Fund: prospectus	

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 The Pride in Place Impact Fund supports local authorities in delivering projects that improve public spaces, foster community pride, and stimulate local economic activity. The funding is for capital only works and cannot be used for initiatives requiring revenue funding.
- 1.2 The Pride in Place Impact Fund has three objectives:
- a. Community spaces: creating, extending, improving or refurbishing existing community facilities and enabling community organisations to take control or ownership of underused but valued local assets.
 - b. Public spaces: enhancing the physical environment in public spaces - examples of initiatives include new or improved green spaces or public squares, improved outdoor play, sports and leisure spaces, installing street furniture, public art or wayfinding.
 - c. High street and town centre revitalisation: making these areas more attractive and welcoming places where people congregate and which encourage economic activity. Examples of initiatives that could be funded are shop frontage improvements, adaptations that bring premises back into use, streetscape improvements, public art, trails and wayfinding, and creating or improving the infrastructure for regular markets.

- 1.3 It should also be noted that when deciding upon projects to deliver, Local Authorities should work in collaboration with the MP and other stakeholders to identify the interventions that will deliver the most benefit to local residents and breathe new life into the areas in which they live.
- 1.4 An initial Member idea for consideration by Cabinet is the development of new, and the enhancement and improvement of current, open space facilities and play areas to be the focus of this grant funding. Already identified as a Fenland Inspire! initiative within the Council's Business Plan, this project will deliver improvements in much used community facilities across many locations of the District.
- 1.5 It is anticipated that the main parks within the four market towns would see significant investment to improve their facilities, whilst a further number of approximately 10 open spaces across the District will also see investment to improve or develop the spaces, enhancing local community assets accordingly.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Allocation of the funding in this way aligns with the Council's corporate priorities and is detailed specifically in the Fenland Inspire! projects within the Business Plan.
- 2.2 It also specifically aligns with objective 2, detailed above in paragraph 4.2, of the Pride in Place Impact Fund guidance.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 If Cabinet approves the project to move forwards, following an assessment of the current open spaces, the Project Officer will consult with local elected Members regarding each space with potential options and projects.
- 3.2 Following that discussion the local community will be consulted to ensure that improvements are what the community would like to see in the spaces selected.
- 3.3 Additionally, as detailed in the Funding Prospectus, the local MP will be engaged in the plans to take forwards for each area selected.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Alternative projects were considered - specifically other projects within the Fenland Inspire! programme. However, due to the very tight prescribed time constraints imposed against this funding, only projects that are realistically deliverable in a short time frame are acceptable for consideration.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

Any procurement will be conducted with the Council's Procurement Team, likely using framework agreements that the Council already has access to ensure that all procurement regulations are complied with.

5.2 Financial Implications

- 5.3 The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28.
- 5.4 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2025/26 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address.
- 5.5 Against this background of considerable pressure on the Council's budget, this particular project, including the necessary officer to deliver the project, is fully funded by the Government grant so will have no impact on the Council's financial situation and General Fund.

5.6 Equality Implications

- 5.7 Facilities added into open spaces will have an accessible element ensuring that all users are able to enjoy themselves in the Council's open spaces.

Agenda Item No:	9	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Local Plan Update	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 In February 2019, Fenland District Council agreed to prepare a new Local Plan. Progress has been slower than expected since publication of the Draft Local Plan due to the uncertainty created by ongoing national planning reforms, Covid 19, updated flood-risk data, resourcing and procurement challenges, and the potential for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It is now necessary to rethink our approach to ensure Fenland continues to have a strong voice after LGR.
- 1.2 This report therefore recommends formally withdrawing the Draft Fenland Local Plan (2019–2040) and beginning work on a new Local Plan under the new plan making system introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. Much of the work done to date can be updated and carried forward into this new process.
- 1.3 The new Plan will provide a more streamlined, responsive, and forward-looking framework that reflects local priorities and clearly articulates the district's ambitions. It will place people and place at its core—ensuring future development supports quality homes, good jobs, town centres, services, and resilient communities. It will also have a facilitative and inward investment focus which is increasingly important given the sluggish national economic context.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Local planning authorities have a statutory duty under Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to prepare and maintain an up-to-date Local Plan. The current Local Plan was adopted in 2014 and some policies in the Plan are becoming increasingly more outdated which is why Council resolved to prepare a new Local Plan in February 2019.
- 2.2 Work on the emerging Local Plan had paused to enable the Council to review and best respond to the multiple changes at the national and local level including new and proposed changes to national policies and plan making guidance. It is recommended that the current emerging Local Plan be withdrawn and replaced with a new style Local Plan developed under new plan making regulations due to be published in the coming months.
- 2.3 The new style Local Plan will consider the plan period 2025-2050, proactively addressing current and emerging place issues including the proposed Fens Reservoir, overconcentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation and the need to

bring forward more supporting infrastructure like health, community and education centres, addressing those issues considered important to Members.

- 2.4 The legal, financial, and equality implications are set out in detail later in this report. In summary, the updated spend profiling confirms that the new Local Plan can be submitted for Examination by March 2028.

Recommendations

- 2.5 For Cabinet to recommend to Council that they:
- a) Withdraw the emerging Fenland Local Plan 2021-2040.
 - b) Commence the production of a new Local Plan under the new system to be completed by March 2028 that will cover the period 2025 to 2050 once the new plan making regulations are published.
 - c) Delegate authority to the Head of Planning in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to publish and keep up to date a new Local Development Scheme.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Dee Laws – Portfolio Holder for Building Control, Flooding, IDBs & Planning
Report Originator(s)	Kirsty Paul – Planning Policy Manager
Contact Officer(s)	Kirsty Paul – Planning Policy Manager kpaul@fenland.gov.uk Dan Horn – Assistant Director dhorn@fenland.gov.uk Matthew Leigh – Head of Planning mleigh@fenland.gov.uk Carol Pilson – Corporate Director & Monitoring Officer cpilson@fenland.gov.uk Simon Machen – Corporate Growth and Regeneration Advisor
Background Papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> February 2019 – Cabinet Report - Local Plan Review and Update

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 A Local Plan is the statutory development plan prepared by a local planning authority to guide decisions on the use and development of land in its area. It sets out the vision, spatial strategy, and policies to deliver housing, economic growth, infrastructure, and environmental protection over a defined plan period. Local Plans form the basis for determining planning applications and are central to shaping how places grow and change in line with community needs and aspirations.
- 1.2 The legal requirement to prepare and maintain an up-to-date Local Plan is set out in Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which requires local planning authorities to produce a Local Development Scheme (LDS) (the timetable for the Plan's production) and keep their development plans under regular review. Local Plans must be prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, as amended.
- 1.3 Regulation 10A of the 2012 Regulations (inserted in 2017) requires that Local Plans be reviewed at least once every five years from the date of adoption, to assess whether they remain effective and up to date. Paragraph 33 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) reinforces this duty, stating that plans should be reviewed to take account of changing circumstances and national policy. Where a review concludes that the plan is no longer effective, a full or partial update must be undertaken.
- 1.4 In Fenland, the currently adopted Local Plan dates from 2014. In February 2019, the Council resolved to begin preparing a new Local Plan for the district to replace the existing plan and respond to updated evidence, national policy changes, and emerging local priorities. Since then, two rounds of public consultation under Regulation 18 have been completed, and a wide range of supporting evidence has been commissioned.
- 1.5 However, progress has been slower than originally anticipated - challenges that have fundamentally slowed the plan-making process, include: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; growing uncertainty surrounding changes to national planning policy and the plan-making process; and internal resourcing challenges following Peterborough City Council's decision in April 2023 to terminate its Service Level Agreement with Fenland District Council, which had previously supported the Council's plan-making efforts.
- 1.6 The Government have also published a host of changes to national planning policy and guidance. This, combined with other developments—such as changes to local place priorities, new technical data for things like flood risk data, proposed reforms to local government, procurement difficulties, and capacity constraints have prompted a reconsideration of the Council's approach.
- 1.7 This report recommends formally withdrawing the current emerging Local Plan (2019–2040) and commencing the preparation of a new Local Plan which would cover the period 2025 to 2050 and be prepared in accordance with the forthcoming new plan making system.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The recommendation to withdraw the emerging Fenland Local Plan (2019–2040) and begin a new plan reflects the scale of recent national reforms and shifting local priorities. Extensive work has already informed the current draft, but changes in legislation, policy, and guidance mean that the methods used to prepare it are no longer completely aligned with how Local Plans must now be produced under the new system.
- 2.2 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act introduces a new plan-making system expected to take effect this year, and Government has set a hard deadline of 31 December 2026 for submitting plans under the current system. Any plan not submitted by then must restart under the new regime. These national decisions leave the Council with limited room to manoeuvre, making it necessary to begin a new-style Local Plan now to ensure Fenland retains a clear and influential voice through and beyond local government reform.
- 2.3 Local circumstances have also evolved. Issues such as the nationally significant Fens Reservoir proposal, pressures from HMOs in Wisbech, new opportunities in advanced manufacturing and clean tech, updated flood-risk modelling, and wider governance uncertainty all require a fresh strategic response. Added to this, the emerging Local Growth Plan identifies Fenland as a key area of investment and opportunity, reinforcing the need for a planning framework that can support and shape this long-term economic potential.
- 2.4 Preparing a new Local Plan will allow the Council to respond proactively to these challenges and opportunities, influence regional planning and investment, and ensure local policies remain legally sound, locally grounded, and nationally compliant. Although some previously completed work will need to be updated, much of it can still inform the new plan, and the district's strong five-year housing land supply provides the space to make this transition responsibly.
- 2.5 The benefits of moving early to the new system outweigh the risks. Acting now avoids duplicated effort, prevents further resource waste as national deadlines approach, and places Fenland in the strongest position to deliver a modern, place-based plan aligned with national reforms and local economic ambitions—ensuring the district can fully capitalise on the investment opportunities set out in the Local Growth Plan and support sustainable growth to 2050 whilst Fenland District Council continues to exist.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 There is no statutory requirement to undertake public consultation before or after withdrawing an emerging Local Plan. However, should Full Council resolve to withdraw the emerging Local Plan 2019–2040, the Council will follow good practice by publishing a public statement on its website and notifying statutory consultees as well as stakeholders who have previously submitted formal representations, as well as MHCLG.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no viable alternative options. The technical work underpinning the existing draft would need to be substantially revisited to meet new national planning guidance, leaving insufficient time to submit a compliant plan under the current system. Continuing with the existing plan is therefore not feasible, and choosing not to prepare a plan is not permitted under national policy. Starting a new Local Plan, whilst retaining much of the information already completed, is the only practical and responsible way to ensure Fenland maintains control over future development and retains a strong voice within the reformed planning system.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

- 5.2 Fenland District Council has a statutory duty to maintain an up-to-date Local Plan under Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Regulation 10A requires plans to be reviewed at least every five years, and paragraph 33 of the NPPF (2024) confirms that plans must be updated where they are no longer effective.
- 5.3 Failure to do so can trigger intervention by the Secretary of State under Section 27, including directing the preparation of a plan, appointing another body to carry out the work, or applying financial sanctions. Withdrawal of the emerging plan may therefore attract scrutiny in terms of whether the Council continues to meet its legal plan-making duties.
- 5.4 However, Fenland currently has a robust five-year housing land supply (around 6.6 years) and strong housing delivery performance. This reduces the risk of speculative development and provides the flexibility needed to transition to a new Local Plan.
- 5.5 Preparing a new plan under the reformed national system will also allow updated policies to reflect current circumstances, including major infrastructure proposals such as the Fens Reservoir, emerging local issues around water resources, flood risk and housing mix, and the need for a long-term strategy for sustainable growth to 2050.
- 5.6 In summary, while withdrawal carries legal risks if the Council is perceived not to be maintaining an up-to-date plan, Fenland's strong supply position and delivery record demonstrate that current requirements are being met. This provides the necessary capacity to prepare a new Local Plan under the reformed system while remaining compliant with statutory and national policy obligations.
- 5.7 *Legal Power to Withdraw the Emerging Local Plan*
- 5.8 The Council has clear legal authority under Section 22 of the 2004 Act to withdraw its emerging Local Plan at any point before adoption. As the current plan has not yet reached submission (Regulation 22), it can be withdrawn by resolution of the Council. While formal notification to the Secretary of State is not required, the Council must update its Local Development Scheme (LDS) and ensure that stakeholders are informed of the change.
- 5.9 *Transition to the Reformed Planning System*

- 5.10 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduces a new legal framework for how Local Plans must be prepared. Under this new system, plans will follow a stricter, “digital-first” process with set stages and a fixed 30-month timetable. The Government has confirmed that any Local Plan still being prepared under the current system must be submitted for examination by 31 December 2026. Plans that miss this deadline cannot continue; they must start again under the new rules.
- 5.11 For Fenland, this creates a key legal and practical risk. If the current Local Plan cannot realistically be submitted in time, continuing with it may lead to wasted work, additional cost, and the possibility of having to restart the entire process later. There is also a risk that work carried out now may not meet the stronger evidence and procedural requirements expected under the updated national guidance.
- 5.12 Withdrawing the current plan at this stage would avoid these risks. It would allow the Council to begin preparing a new Local Plan that is fully aligned with the new system from the start. This provides greater certainty, reduces the chance of legal challenge around process or compliance, and ensures that time and resources are focused on producing a plan that meets future national requirements rather than those being phased out.

5.13 Financial Implications

- 5.14 Withdrawing the emerging Local Plan and preparing a new plan under the reformed national system will have financial implications, but continuing under the current system would be significantly more costly. Much of the technical evidence supporting the existing draft needs to be updated due to national policy changes, updated demographic and flood-risk data, and new information on nationally significant projects such as the Fens Reservoir. This evidence would need to be updated regardless of the route taken.
- 5.15 The cost of preparing a new Local Plan under the forthcoming system is estimated at £659,500–£783,000 (excluding salaries). The Council currently holds £386,702.17 in a dedicated planning reserve, built up from Government planning policy grants, and anticipated income from the team’s work on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects is expected to further support delivery. The Council was also awarded £220,000 from government to develop the Local Plan and there has been more recent announcements about more funding potentially being available. Together, these funding streams mean the new plan-making process is likely to remain cost neutral (when planned MTFS/budget provision is included).
- 5.16 Budget provision will be included in the MTFS for 2026/27 onwards as part of the normal budget setting process.

5.17 Equality Implications

- 5.18 In considering withdrawal of the emerging Local Plan, the Council has assessed its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. As the emerging plan has not been adopted, it currently carries limited weight, though supporting evidence—such as the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment—remains valid and can continue to inform decisions.

- 5.19 The draft plan included policies aimed at meeting the needs of groups with protected characteristics, but these are not yet in use. The adopted Local Plan still provides a stable framework that supports mixed, inclusive communities.
- 5.20 Preparing a new Local Plan under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act will allow these equality-focused policies to be reviewed and strengthened. The new system encourages early, inclusive engagement and improved digital accessibility, and Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken at key stages to identify and mitigate impacts.
- 5.21 In summary, withdrawing the emerging plan does not conflict with the Council's equality duties, and the new plan-making process provides an opportunity to enhance equality outcomes.

5.22 Any Other Relevant Implications

5.23 Crime and Community Safety

- 5.24 The Local Plan plays a role in shaping safe and inclusive environments through policies on layout, design, lighting, public spaces, and community facilities. Withdrawal of the emerging plan may temporarily delay the introduction of updated policies that help reduce opportunities for crime and promote safer places. The Council will need to ensure that community safety remains a core principle within the new plan and that engagement with Cambridgeshire Constabulary's Designing Out Crime Officer is maintained during policy and site allocation development.

5.25 Environmental and Climate Impacts

- 5.26 The current Local Plan process includes updated policies relating to sustainability, flood risk management, biodiversity net gain, and resource efficiency. Withdrawing the plan may result in a delay to the adoption of these strengthened environmental policies, which could in turn affect the delivery of more sustainable and resilient development across the district.
- 5.27 However, preparing a new Local Plan under the forthcoming system may offer opportunities to take a more ambitious and evidence-led approach to environmental policy. This could include enhanced protections for nature recovery, better integration of water resource planning, and more effective responses to environmental risks and pressures in line with updated national expectations.

5.28 Economic Growth and Infrastructure Delivery

- 5.29 A Local Plan is a critical tool in coordinating infrastructure, supporting inward investment, and providing certainty to developers and landowners. Withdrawal may temporarily create uncertainty, particularly for strategic infrastructure providers (e.g. utilities, education, health), housing associations, and the business community. This risk should be managed through clear communication and close coordination with partners.

6 SCHEDULES

N/A

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Agenda Item No:	10	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Wisbech High Street Update	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with a monthly update regarding the ongoing construction work at 24 High Street, Wisbech and the pre-construction design and planning work for 11-12 High Street, Wisbech.

2 24 High Street Construction progress

- 2.1 The building is now complete.
- 2.2 Following a further Building Control inspection to assess updated works that the initial inspection highlighted, the building has received the necessary certification. During week beginning 15 December, the project team expects to meet with the contractor and for Practical Completion to finally take place, meaning that FDC will then take possession from the contractor and responsibility for the building.
- 2.3 FDC's property team is in the process of finding a tenant for the small ground floor shop area and the flats above that will let at a fair value.
- 2.4 The Council will hold an official completion ceremony in January with partners invited to mark this significant project and the high impact that this work has had on improving the historic High Street of Wisbech.

3 24 High Street; some history and the pathway to finally filling 40-year Gap in Wisbech High Street

- 3.1 No. 24 High Street was the site of a four storey 18th century building prior to its collapse approximately 40 years ago. Known locally as Cooks Butchers or The Gap there has not been a building on the High Street frontage since that time - until now.

Timeline of the building at 24 High Street

- 3.2 The shop was occupied by John Hives who was described as a hardware man in the 1850 trade directory. The 1861 census records John living there during that year along with his wife Sarah, two daughters and a servant.
- 3.3 By 1869 the shop was taken over by W Friend and then in 1870, by John Friend who, in the trade directory for that year were described as "Fancy Dealer and London, Birmingham and Sheffield Warehouse". The 1871 census records John Friend as a general merchant and living at No 24 with his wife Mary, his baby daughter, a servant, and a nurse. He is still registered there in 1883 as Birmingham and Sheffield warehouse and marine store dealer, Nene Quay. Interestingly, the plot of No 24 at that time would have also been

accessed from Nene Quay and the building which still survives at the rear of 24 today may have been his warehouse.

- 3.4 By 1896, the building became occupied by Thomas Tansley Jr, who was registered on the 1911 census living at the address with his wife Alice, 4 children and 2 servants. He was still there in 1916.
- 3.5 The 1932-3 Kellys Trade Directory lists the occupier as Charles Leonard Cook, butcher. The building remained **Cooks Butchers** until shortly before its collapse in the mid-1980s.
- 3.6 **Images of 24 High Street, Wisbech through the Ages**



High St, Late 19th Century, showing butchers on closest on the right

Credit: Wisbech and Fenland Museum (ref MS 248)



23-24 High St, c.1960s *Credit: Geoff Hastings*



24 High Street, 2017 *Credit: Taleyna Fletcher*



24 High Street, 2017 *Credit: Taleyna Fletcher*

Filling the Gap

- 3.7 Following several years of regular Cabinet updates regarding this challenging and costly project, the Council can feel proud that 'The Gap' in Wisbech High Street has finally been filled.
- 3.8 The work required to get to the point of completion cannot be underestimated and started back in 2013 when the Wisbech Society set up a discussion between Councils and English Heritage, with a hope to develop a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to improve the dilapidated buildings in Wisbech High Street.
- 3.9 Following a successful bid there was then a period of time when the future of 24 High Street was uncertain with projects such as a viewing platform being considered - and rejected - as a solution to fill The Gap.
- 3.10 Even at the point of appointing an initial contractor the project was frustrated again when the contractor pulled out at short notice as another project could not proceed in tandem with No. 24. This meant re-procuring a contractor with the time and energy that such a process takes.
- 3.11 Working on such a narrow site with terrible access, poor ground conditions due to the closeness of the river, no local site yard, and a busy High Street directly outside the site has been a considerable challenge.
- 3.12 Much has been learnt during the construction process, and this learning will be implemented during the 11-12 High Street project. This should mean that construction of 11-12 High Street proceeds more smoothly than the work at No. 24.
- 3.13 24 High Street experienced delays with piling works and then issues with ensuring that the new building fitted into the tight site itself.
- 3.14 Working on an historic High Street also brings problems with neighbouring properties in terms of making good party walls and working in a way such that vibrations are minimised to prevent damage to neighbouring properties. On the evidence of the No. 24 project, it is likely that there will be issues at neighbouring properties that will require remedying as part of the project at No.'s 11-12.
- 3.15 The completed building changes how the High Street both looks and feels and is a significant enhancement to the streetscape of the town.



24 High Street - 2025

11-12 High Street, Wisbech


- 3.16 There is no further update following November's Cabinet report regarding 11-12 High Street.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 That Cabinet notes the report.

Wards Affected	Medworth ward	
Forward Plan Reference	KEY21APR22/01	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton Cllr Chris Boden	Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance
Report Originator	Phil Hughes	Head of Service

Contact Officers	<p>Phil Hughes Head of Service</p> <p>Mark Greenwood Head of Service</p> <p>Paul Medd Chief Executive</p> <p>Peter Catchpole Corporate Director and S151 Officer</p>
Background Papers	<p>Previous monthly Cabinet reports regarding Wisbech High Street</p> <p>July 2022 Cabinet and Council reports regarding 24 High Street, Wisbech</p> <p>June 2025 Cabinet papers regarding the Fenland Inspire! project and 11-12 High Street, Wisbech</p>

Agenda Item No:	11	
Committee:	Cabinet	
Date:	15 December 2025	
Report Title:	Whittlesey Relief Road update and potential funding opportunities for the Strategic Outline Case recommendations	

Cover sheet:

Purpose / Summary

1. This report relates to the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Business Case (SOC) and possible opportunities to fund the recommendations from this 2025 study. Members are requested to:
 - Write to the CPCA under their budget consultation to request inclusion of the cost of the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC recommendations report in the CPCA 2026/2027 budget or, failing that, in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the 2027/2028 budget.
 - Contact Whittlesey Town Council requesting that they consider offering financial support towards the cost of the report.
 - Consider inclusion within FDC's next budget or Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). For the provision of funds to cover or contribute towards the cost of the next Whittlesey Relief Road report, as a backstop position.

Key Issues

- 2.1 The 2025 SOC set out a strong case for studying ways to address the current transport problems in Whittlesey and developed four shortlisted options to address these. The recommended scheme from the four shortlisted was the delivery of a relief road to the south of Whittlesey, Eastrea and Coates, with HGV rerouting and improvements to the active travel network within the town.
- 2.2 The SOC highlights current capacity issues at key junctions, high levels of traffic and lack of resilience on the network which is expected to worsen as more housing is created. Development in and around Whittlesey is strong and planning applications continue to come forward. Without intervention on the highway network this level of growth is unsustainable. Continued and increasing issues caused by congestion and HGV traffic in Whittlesey is expected to impact the potential for future growth. However, at present, there are no developments directly reliant on the delivery of this scheme.
- 2.3 The DfT value for money framework is not just about the benefit-cost ratio, but the full range of impacts a scheme can have. Despite this, for a scheme to be considered for funding by the DfT, a positive BCR must be achieved. The current BCR for the Whittlesey Relief Road scheme in its current form shows poor value for money. This is due to the high cost to deliver this scale of intervention.

- 2.4 A wide range of positive impacts the Whittlesey Relief Road scheme will have for Whittlesey has been set out in the SOC. Key to this is the creation of a sense of place and community, protecting the historic market town and improving the health and wellbeing of its residents. To fully realise these in the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) and strengthen the value for money of the scheme additional work is needed to quantify and monetise these positive impacts.
- 2.5 The SOC recommended that further work should be undertaken at a cost of £220,000 to examine the following:
- Assess whether the scale and scope of the scheme can be reduced to lower costs.
 - Further appraise non-monetised benefits to seek means to include these in the BCR assessment.
 - Use the newly available Cambridgeshire and Peterborough traffic model to capture broader networkwide benefits.
 - Consider the schemes role in support of long-term strategic land use (linked to the emerging local plan).
- 2.6 Since the SOC report was produced, further planning permissions have been sought for residential and commercial developments in and around Whittlesey off the A605, strengthening the case for the Whittlesey Relief Road.
- 2.7 At the November 2025 CPCA Board Meeting the Mayor expressed support for progressing Whittlesey Capital Transport schemes. At the same meeting the CPCA initiated a public consultation on their 2026/2027 budget, the consultation to close on January 12th, 2026.
- 2.8 Contact should be made with Whittlesey Town Council about possible funding for the report. Consideration should also be given at this FDC Cabinet meeting about the potential to cover or make a contribution towards the £220,000 funding to complete the recommendations.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are requested to:
- Write to the CPCA under the budget consultation to request inclusion of the cost of the next Whittlesey Relief Road report in the CPCA 2026/2027 budget or, failing that, in the MTFS for 2027/2028.
 - Contact Whittlesey Town Council requesting that they consider offering financial support towards the cost of the report.
 - Consider inclusion within FDC's next budget or MTFS for the provision of funds to cover or contribute towards the cost of the next Whittlesey Relief Road report, as a backstop position.

Wards Affected	All Whittlesey wards
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Boden – Leader of the Council Cllr Christy – Cabinet Member for Transport
Report Originator(s)	Wendy Otter (Transport Development Manager)
Contact Officer(s)	Wendy Otter (Transport Development Manager) Email: wotter@fenland.gov.uk Anna Goodall (Assistant Director) Email: agoodall@fenland.gov.uk
Background Papers	<p>FDC Cabinet – May 2025 https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=3070&Ver=4</p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Final Report https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17117/Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20SOC%20FINAL.pdf</p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Final Report Appendix A to O https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17118/Combined%20Appendices%20A%20to%20O.pdf</p> <p>Whittlesey Relief Road SOC Options Appraisal Report and Appendix A to E https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s17119/Combined%20OAR%20Appendices%20A%20to%20E.pdf</p> <p>FDC Cabinet – 16 March 2023 https://moderngov.fenland.gov.uk/documents/s11850/Cabinet%20Paper%20March%202023%20-%20Whittlesey%20Relief%20Road%20V2%206.2.2023%20updated%2002.03.23.pdf</p> <p>FDC Cabinet – 9 January 2022 Report and appendices.pdf (fenland.gov.uk)</p> <p>CPCA Board Meeting – 30 November 2022 353.pdf</p> <p>Whittlesey Town Council 2021 – Whittlesey Relief Road Inception Study Whittlesey Relief Road - Whittlesey Town Council</p>

Report:

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In January 2020, FDC Cabinet approved a series of economic masterplans under the title of Growing Fenland. This included a Growing Fenland Whittlesey masterplan setting out a series of projects aimed at improving this historic town. The need for a Whittlesey Southern Relief Road scheme is one element of this masterplan which featured highly in responses to the public consultation work that supported the strategy.
- 1.2 Later in 2020 Whittlesey Town Council commissioned the Whittlesey Relief Road Inception Study. The key findings of this study state that there is a sound strategic case with a few benefit areas and reasonable alignment with local plans and strategies. There is a reasonable prospect of value for money although this may be dependent on development. The report also noted some engineering challenges around flood risk and the railway level crossing. The consultants' overall conclusion is as follows:

"it is therefore concluded there is sufficient evidence to justify scheme progression, and it is recommended that the scheme proceeds to the next stage evaluation, namely, Strategic Outline Business Case."

- 1.3 Further information about this study including a copy of the report can be found on the Town Council website as follows: [Whittlesey Relief Road - Whittlesey Town Council](#).
- 1.4 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) supported the Growing Fenland masterplans financially through their Market Towns Programme. In November 2022, a market towns finance update paper was taken to CPCA Board. This included a proposal for reallocating £255,750 of funding towards a Whittlesey Southern Relief Road SOC. This was approved subject to a funding application from Fenland District Council in January 2023. The main factors for this CPCA decision being the inclusion of the Whittlesey Relief Road project in the Growing Fenland Masterplan for Whittlesey, the Whittlesey Town Council Relief Road Inception Study and its positive outcome, along with 80% of respondents calling for this study to be progressed as part of CPCA 2022-2023 budget review.
- 1.5 Between March 2023 and March 2025, the Whittlesey Relief Road Strategic Outline Case was delivered. The work was overseen by a Project Board consisting of elected Members from Fenland District Council, Whittlesey Town Council and Cambridgeshire County Council and chaired by the then FDC Portfolio Holder for Transport and Social Mobility.

2. Whittlesey Relief Road SOC

- 2.1 In March 2023, FDC Cabinet confirmed the Member-led Project Board and terms of reference to deliver the governance for the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC project. The Project Board consisted of elected Members from Fenland District Council, Whittlesey Town Council and Cambridgeshire County Council, chaired by the FDC Portfolio Holder for Transport and Social Mobility.
- 2.2 FDC appointed Mott MacDonald, a specialist contractor, to complete the technical work for the project, including a Department for Transport compliant Strategic Outline Case (SOC). The development of the SOC was managed by the FDC Senior Transport Officer and key decisions and project monitoring undertaken through regular Project Board meetings.
- 2.3 Work was undertaken from September 2023 to March 2025 to develop the SOC for a relief road for Whittlesey. This included a comprehensive review of the context, opportunities, issues and risks relating to a relief road and its role in relation to Whittlesey. This encompassed current and future scenarios and was set against the full range of transport issues within and around the town. An existing conditions report, baseline data review, case for change, traffic and transport surveys and several stakeholder workshops were delivered as part of this work.
- 2.4 Scheme objectives were identified for the project relating to four key themes. These are Sustainable Growth; Connectivity and Access to Opportunity; Health, Wellbeing and Sense of Community; and Environment. Each of which were given equal priority and weighting.
- 2.5 A long list of 35 options was identified through a Stakeholder Workshop held in May 2024. Attendees of the workshop included officers from FDC, CCC, CPCA and PCC along with representatives from Sustrans, Environment Agency, Stagecoach, Network Rail and Greater Anglia.
- 2.6 Other workshops were also held to engage with local businesses and social groups and to capture insights and feedback about the transport issues in Whittlesey and views on the longlist and shortlist of the options identified to address these issues.
- 2.7 Four shortlisted options were identified through a sifting process that identified which proposals performed best against scheme objectives. These were worked up into more detail and put to Public Consultation from 23 October to 22 November 2024. During this time, 2 face to face drop in events were held in Whittlesey and 1 online session to enable members of the public and stakeholders to engage with the project team and ask questions. Telephone and email contact details were also provided to enable people to get in touch directly and an online survey was available throughout the consultation period to capture responses. The online survey questions were provided in hard copy for those that needed them. These were sent by post or available to collect from Whittlesey Town Council offices where the consultation materials were on display.
- 2.8 In total, 310 responses were received through the online form, mostly from people who live or work in or around Whittlesey. The main age group of respondents was between 26 and 55 years, with only one respondent aged

under 25. 75% were in paid employment or did voluntary work and 88% of those in work travelled to their place of work in a private car or van.

- 2.9 72% of respondents agreed with the scheme objectives and 23% neither agreed nor disagreed. Option 1 – a relief road with HGV routing was ranked the most popular of the 4 options with strong support also shown for Option 2 which included active travel improvements for Whittlesey. Some respondents explained that their reason for choosing Option 1 over Option 2 was that the scheme was likely to be expensive and therefore they were concerned that there would not be enough money to do a relief road and active travel improvements. The least popular option was the (comparably) low-cost Option 4 – a mobility hub with active travel improvements. Option 3 – a relief road with HGV rerouting and bus priority measures received some support but concerns were raised that the bus improvements would have little effect and were therefore not worth including.
- 2.10 The overall results and feedback from the Public Consultation and stakeholder engagement were weighed against the outcome of the options appraisal for the four options to identify the preferred option to take forward. This concluded that the best performing option is Option 3 – a relief road with HGV rerouting and active travel improvements. This option reroutes traffic and HGVs away from the town centre and improves the centre itself, supporting non-motorised transport, encouraging physical activity and providing more overall benefit than the relief road on its own.
- 2.11 Additional technical work relating to network resilience was completed in early 2025 to support the SOC. This provided additional analysis around the impact of road closures such as the B1040 caused by flooding and issues relating to the lane reduction on The Causeway during 2024 and 2025.
- 2.12 The Whittlesey Relief Road SOC concluded the following:
- 2.13 That there is a need for investment in a Scheme that addresses the issues Whittlesey is experiencing in relation to traffic along the A605. That there is an opportunity to support the growth of the town and the development of the new Fenland Local Plan, in relation to housing and employment opportunities, by providing additional transport network capacity. That there is a need to build greater resilience to the road network to support the movement of people across the area, including during the high occurrence of road closures in the area due to flooding. That there is an opportunity to develop active travel improvements through the centre of Whittlesey to improve options for sustainable travel and aid in the sense of place for the town centre. That the best performing option to address the transport issues in Whittlesey is the delivery of a Relief Road with HGV re-routing and active travel improvements.
- 2.14 The SOC recommended that further work should be undertaken to examine the following:
- Assess whether the scale of the scheme can be reduced to lower costs, such as by considering a shorter route for the relief road.
 - Use the newly available Cambridge and Peterborough Sub-regional Model to capture a broader network-wide assessment of the scheme's benefits and a more detailed assessment of its impact on network resilience.

- Further appraise non-monetised benefits to identify opportunities to monetise them for inclusion in the Initial Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) assessment, thereby strengthening the final Value for Money position of the scheme.
 - Examine how the scheme could support long-term strategic land use and economic growth across the region. Consider the scheme's potential role in unlocking development opportunities along the wider A605 corridor, linking it to the emerging Fenland Local Plan. This could allow for any wider economic impacts of the scheme to be explicitly claimed and included in any Indicative BCR assessment, further strengthening the final Value for Money position.
- 2.15 The final SOC was completed in February 2025 and approved by the Project Board in March 2025. A peer review was undertaken by Steers as part of the CPCA assurance process. This supported the approach undertaken to complete the SOC and the overall level of benefit identified. It did raise concern over the poor BCR for the scheme and suggested the scale of the scheme as currently presented outweighs the issues it aims to address.
- 2.16 The next steps for the project require funding for further assessment work. At the May 2025 meeting, FDC Cabinet requested that Officers explore options to secure the £220,000 third party funding. In November 2025 at the CPCA Board meeting, the mayor expressed support for Whittlesey capital transport projects. At the same meeting a public consultation was initiated on the 2026/2027 CPCA budget. Representations can be made to this consultation about priority projects for funding. There is also potential to ask Whittlesey Town Council to help fund the work and for FDC to also consider covering the costs or contributing as a back stop.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The total cost for the Whittlesey Relief Road SOC was £277,783. This was funded by the original £260,000 Market Towns Fund plus some additional underspend from other Growing Fenland projects. This investment has delivered a SOC which makes a clear case for the need for traffic interventions in Whittlesey.
- 3.2 The best performing scheme to address the issues in Whittlesey has been identified as a southern relief road, HGV rerouting and active travel improvements. The cost of a scheme of this scale is significant and requires further work to understand the monetised value the wider benefits it may bring. The Benefit to Cost Ratio for the project is currently too low for the project to progress to Outline Business Case. The recommended assessment work would focus on addressing the gap between the benefits costed so far and the scale and cost of the proposed scheme with the aim of creating a stronger BCR.
- 3.3 To undertake the additional assessment, the scheme requires development funding. At its meeting in May 2025, Cabinet approved a recommendation that officers explore potential opportunities to secure the £220,000 funding needed to complete the recommendations in the SOC. Following the November CPCA Board meeting, where the Mayor expressed support for progressing Whittlesey

capital transport schemes, there is an opportunity via public consultation to influence the public consultation for their 2026/2027 budget and to consider other possible funding sources.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Please refer to paragraphs 2.8, 2.9, 2.10 above which confirm the public consultation in support of the scheme, that was part of the Whittlesea Relief Road SOC project.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 A non-relief road option was included in the shortlisted options and the public consultation. This performed poorly against the scheme objectives, particularly due to it not affecting the current routing of HGVs. This option was garnered the least support of all the options.
- 5.2 The conclusion of the project highlights that transport interventions are needed for Whittlesey and that one single solution is unlikely to resolve all the towns transport issues. This suggests a multi-mode; multi-faceted approach is needed. Part of the solution is therefore likely to include the Cambridgeshire County Council as the Local Highway Authority and CPCA as the Local Transport Authority programmes to develop transport proposals across all modes of transport; a new Transport Strategy for Fenland District covering all modes of transport; and walking and cycling proposals for Whittlesey included within the new district transport strategy, the Fenland Walking, Cycling and Mobility Aid Strategy and the County Council emerging Active Travel Strategy. Fenland District Council's work with CPCA and others to develop plans to significantly improve Whittlesey railway station will also be a significant factor.
- 5.3 A key component for any solution for transport issues in Whittlesey will need to continue to consider alternative ways to address the key issues that need resolving. Alternative options must be considered to satisfy funding requirements and therefore they will continue to form part of this work.

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legal Implications

- 6.2 There are no legal implications in relation to the recommendations set out in this report however, if funding is successfully secured, the appointment of a consultant to undertake the additional works will be made in compliance with the Council's Code of Procurement.

6.3 Financial Implications

- 6.4 As stated above, £220,000 is needed to continue the development of the case for a relief road for Whittlesey. This is currently neither funded or part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), although it is noted that the recommendation is for Members to write to the CPCA under the budget consultation to request

inclusion of the cost of the next Whittlesey South Relief Road report in the CPCA's 26/7 budget or, failing that, in the MTFS for 27/8.

- 6.5 FDC was not previously expected to fund this additional work and as such it is not currently included within the budget. The General Fund Budget Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report, agreed by Cabinet and Council in February, projects a financial shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.432m increasing year on year amounting to around £3.4m by 2027/28. Members may wish to agree to include this within the FDC 26/27 budget as a back stop should the request to CPCA for funding not be forthcoming, particularly given the potential significance of the Relief Road development for the area.
- 6.6 Although there are currently many uncertainties regarding the budget for 2026/27 and the MTFS, there remains a significant structural deficit which the Council will need to address and therefore any additional budget considerations should be considered within this context.
- 6.7 **Equality Implications**
- 6.8 Building a case for traffic interventions for Whittlesey is concerned with improving the economic and social performance of the town. Existing transport challenges in and around Whittlesey cause disruption and congestion. This project is one component of the transport strategy set out in the Growing Fenland report for Whittlesey which has a multi modal approach. Proposals for transport projects to assist all members of the community are being taken forward and considered as part of a wide range of policies and strategies.

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**DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN –
Updated 5 December 2025**

(For any queries, please refer to the published forward plan)

CABINET

CABINET DATE	ITEMS	LEAD PORTFOLIO HOLDER
26 January 2026	1. Fenland Inspire! Projects Update	Cllr Boden
	2. Fees and Charges	Cllr Boden
	3. Air Quality Update, Wisbech	Cllr Wallwork Cllr Imafidon
	4. Grounds Maintenance Contract	Cllr French
	5. Purchase of gym cardio equipment and spinning equipment for 4 x leisure centres	Cllr Wallwork
	6. Wisbech High Street Update	Cllr Seaton Cllr Hoy Cllr Tierney
	7. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
23 February 2026	1. Business Plan 2026/27	Cllr Boden
	2. Budget & MTFS 2026/27	Cllr Boden
	3. Fenland Inspire! Projects Update	Cllr Boden
	4. RECAP Waste Strategy	Cllr Tierney
	5. Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) Update	Cllr Boden Cllr French
	6. Change in Freedom Leisure contractual arrangements to an agency approach	Cllr Wallwork
	7. Wisbech High Street Update	Cllr Seaton Cllr Hoy Cllr Tierney
	8. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
23 March 2026	1. Investment Board Update & review of the Commercial & Investment Strategy	Cllr Boden Cllr Tierney Cllr Imafidon
	2. Fenland Inspire! Projects Update	Cllr Boden
	3. Wisbech High Street Update	Cllr Seaton Cllr Hoy Cllr Tierney
	4. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
27 April 2026	1. Fenland Inspire! Projects Update	Cllr Boden
	2. Fenland Inspire! Project – 3G Artificial Turf Pitches	Cllr Seaton
	3. Development Management Agreement for the Remodelling and Extension Works for the Manor Leisure Centre	Cllr Boden Cllr Count
	4. Wisbech High Street Update	Cllr Seaton Cllr Hoy Cllr Tierney
	5. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
18 May 2026	1. Fenland Inspire! Projects Update	Cllr Boden

CABINET DATE	ITEMS	LEAD PORTFOLIO HOLDER
	2. Wisbech High Street Update	Cllr Seaton Cllr Hoy Cllr Tierney
	3. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden
TBC June 2026	1. Appointment to Outside Bodes	Cllr Boden
	2. Fenland Inspire! Projects Update	Cllr Boden
	3. Development Management Agreement for the Remodelling and Extension Works for the Manor Leisure Centre	Cllr Boden Cllr Count
	4. Wisbech High Street Update	Cllr Seaton Cllr Hoy Cllr Tierney
	5. Cabinet Draft Forward Plan	Cllr Boden

TBC = To be confirmed

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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