

Greater Norwich Local Plan – Opening Statement

The opening of the examination into the Greater Norwich Local Plan is an important milestone for the area and those of us who are involved in the planning and delivery of growth within it. The process of producing it started in 2016 and a joint team with staff drawn from all three districts and Norfolk County Council have been working on it consistently since then. The fact that we chose, unlike many other areas, to accelerate the pace of the project in the light of the uncertainty created by the potential changes to the planning system and the publication of the planning white paper shows the willingness of the local authorities to drive the growth agenda and our shared commitment to deliver it.

The world is constantly changing, and the pace of this change appears to have increased in recent years with the recognition of the challenge of climate change, the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. However, the fundamentals of what makes Greater Norwich a great place to live, work and invest have not changed.

The local councils recognised that it was in our common interest to plan co-operatively, unconstrained by administrative boundaries, for a major growing city and its hinterland many years ago. This led to the production of the Joint Core Strategy, the signing of the City Deal and the formation of the Greater Norwich Growth Board to pool resources and co-ordinate the delivery of infrastructure. This in turn has led to the area being seen as a credible and trustworthy partner in delivering growth. Our success with the towns fund, the community renewal fund, and the housing infrastructure fund, to support the delivery of existing growth targets in a sustainable way, are testament to this.

That is why, more than ever, we need to ensure our unique area has an ambitious clear and deliverable development plan in place. This de-risks investment for industry and improves the prospects of leveraging in external funding where this may be necessary. This is vital to delivering well-planned development so that growth brings with it benefits for all and provides a sustainable future for the next generations.

Broadland District Council, Norwich City Council and South Norfolk Council, in cooperation with Norfolk County Council and the Broads Authority, have been planning strategically for Greater Norwich for over 15 years. We have one of the leading local partnerships nationally and were pleased to enter a City Deal with government in 2013. This led to the formation of the Greater Norwich Growth Board. The Board helps to implement our plans through our unique approach to pooling the Community Infrastructure Levy to deliver a shared programme of infrastructure investment across the Greater Norwich area.

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership, a Member body representing each of the councils which oversees our development plans, chose to build on this success. Following the adoption of the Joint Core Strategy, site allocation and development management plans, the partnership decided to produce a the GNLP, a plan which brings together for the first time not only the strategic policies but also the site allocations covering the area.

The Greater Norwich Local Plan will provide the planning policies and allocate the sites to update, develop and refine our long-term strategy for sustainable growth to 2038, building on the existing Joint Core Strategy which it will replace. It will provide a building block to take us forward towards the new local plan system.

We live in a period of unprecedented uncertainty, with the still emerging impacts of Brexit and Covid, alongside behavioural changes and technological developments driven by climate change. Therefore, the Greater Norwich Local Plan must take a flexible and pragmatic approach to planning, whilst setting the direction locally to deliver growth and prepare for the government's commitment to establish a new approach to local plans.

The plan needs to deliver high-quality homes, new jobs and supporting infrastructure – including broadband, transport, schools, and health care. We have identified housing sites that will be sustainable into the longer-term and provide homes for all, from young people looking for their first home through to meeting the needs of an ageing population, along with sites for new and expanded employment uses providing choice and opportunity for business.

Protecting and enhancing our environment, natural habitats, and landscapes, including creating new green infrastructure, are key to the strategy. Greater Norwich has low rainfall rates, but it also contains and is adjacent to nationally important and sensitive water environments, including the Broads National Park and the River Wensum Special Area of Conservation. Consequently, the plan has policies which promote biodiverse, water and energy efficient growth as part of its broad-based approach to develop a low carbon economy and respond to climate change.

The plan identifies the level of growth needed from 2018 to 2038, with 40,000 new homes being required to achieve government targets. However, we need to be ambitious and ensure we are prepared for stronger economic growth, so additional sites have been allocated to deliver an extra 5,000 homes. To ensure growth is delivered and to deal with uncertainty, the plan identifies opportunities for around 10% additional growth. We already have plans in place which identify locations for 74% of the new homes proposed in the plan, and over 5,000 of those homes were built between 2018 and 2020.

The sites allocated in this plan, both those carried forward from previous plans and new sites, focus most of the growth in the Norwich urban area. Our “strategic regeneration sites” at East Norwich and at Anglia Square in the Northern City Centre, in addition to other city sites, will regenerate brownfield land. Sustainable growth on the edge of the urban area is also planned to provide homes where there is excellent access to jobs and facilities. At the same time, our rural area will play its part and the plan provides for growth in our towns and villages to provide choice, enhance village vitality, and to support, and be supported by, local services.

Our local economy has strong foundations. To play our part in the wider national recovery, economic growth needs to be encouraged in the right locations. The plan provides opportunities for businesses to establish, expand or relocate within the Greater Norwich area, encouraging innovation and building on our strengths, particularly in the Agri-tech,

digital creative, advanced engineering, education, and scientific sectors. We are also ideally placed to take advantage of and strengthen our links with Cambridge and become attractive for inward investment. Our economic assets include:

- Norwich Research Park, including the University of East Anglia, is Europe's largest single site hub of research, training, education, and enterprise in food and health, specialising in climate change research.
- The growing cluster of digital creative businesses in Norwich is recognised in the Tech Nation report, with our two leading universities providing the creative and technical talent needed to fuel growth in the sector.
- Norwich is home to a significant financial and insurance sector, including brands such as Aviva, Marsh, Moneyfacts and the Alan Boswell Group.
- Hethel Engineering Centre is a regional hub for innovation and technology and can expand to meet the demand for incubation space. Businesses and the University of East Anglia have developed a new Institute for Productivity (launched in 2021) building on UEA's expertise in business education and engineering.
- Norwich Airport which provides national and international connections and is the main base for helicopter access to nearby offshore energy development. The airport hosts a cluster of aviation businesses and the International Aviation Academy training the next generation of aviation professionals
- With the City, the Broads and countryside, Greater Norwich is a major visitor and tourism destination.

The Greater Norwich Local Plan will help our area realise its potential. It will deliver the homes, jobs, infrastructure, environmental benefits, and low carbon growth which we need. The plan will enable and stimulate the creation of a strong, enterprising, productive, broad-based, and low-carbon economy, supported by an increasingly skilled workforce, together with the growth of a wide range of economic sectors.

Collectively we stand ready to deliver on these far-reaching ambitions for everyone who lives and works in Greater Norwich and look forward to explaining the benefits of our plan to you more fully during the examination.