

<b>Council meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	30 July 2025
<b>Report Title</b>	To note the decisions from the Urgent Decisions meeting held on 27 June 2025 to agree the additional costs of the Highsted Park Inquiry.
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
<b>Head of Service</b>	Joanne Johnson, Head of Place
<b>Lead Officer</b>	
<b>Classification</b>	Open with restricted appendix
<b>Recommendations</b>	Council is asked to note the decisions made by the Urgent Decisions Committee.

## 1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report asks Council to note the decisions made by the Emergency Committee on 27 June 2025 as set out below:

(1) That the additional estimated costs for the Highsted Inquiry be noted.  
(2) That it be agreed that the balance of any additional costs be drawn from reserves, should officers be unable to find compensatory in-year savings, in consultation with Group Leaders.  
(3) That all Contract Standing Orders (procurement) waivers necessary to enable the timely procurement of the required services be endorsed.  
(4) That legal opinion be sought on the process of the Secretary of State calling-in the application.

The report to the Urgent Decisions Committee can be viewed here: [Agenda for Urgent Decisions Committee on Friday, 27 June 2025, 9.30 am](#)

## 2 Background

- 2.1 The Highsted Park planning applications (referred to as Land to the West of Teynham and Land South and East of Sittingbourne - references 21/503906/EIOUT and 21/503914/EIOUT respectively) were called in by the Secretary of State on 7th November 2024.
- 2.2 The applications were scheduled for Public Inquiry, to be sat in four separate sittings lasting a total of twelve weeks across March – July 2025. The Council has no budget for Public Inquiries, and no planning budget suitably sized to accommodate such costs and on this basis, on 20th December 2024, the Urgent Decisions Committee met to agree the approach to the Inquiry and the related costs.
- 2.3 On 12th June 2025, the Planning Inspector indicated that the Highsted Inquiry might need to be extended by two weeks and on 20th June 2025, twelve

additional days were scheduled, with the Inquiry now due to conclude on 31st October 2025.

- 2.4 The additional sitting time incurs costs that are outside of the budget agreed by the Urgent Decisions Committee, so further member consideration was required and on 27 June 2025, the Urgent Decisions Committee agreed the recommendations set out above.

### **3. Proposals**

Council is asked to note the decisions agreed by the Urgent Decisions Committee.

### **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 The report is for noting only.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 The report is for noting only and consultation is not appropriate .

### **6 Implications**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Corporate Plan	Robustly putting the case of the Council to the Inquiry will contribute to ensuring homes and jobs are delivered in line with providing the right homes and employment opportunities in the right places. If the Secretary of State does grant planning permission it is important to ensure the Borough's priorities, including in relation to the environment, health and housing are met through negotiating adequate conditions and planning obligations to mitigate the impacts of the development
Financial, Resource and Property	The Urgent Decisions Committee agreed in December 2024 to allocate funds to the Inquiry. Putting forward the Council's case has significantly impacted the Council's finances. The Council is now required to host the Inquiry over an additional period and this will exacerbate this, both in terms of actual costs (e.g. Legal representation), but also the officer time required to prepare for, support and service the Inquiry. There will be consequences in terms of meeting room availability for other purposes.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Involvement in the Inquiry will require the drafting of section106 agreements that would be secured as part of any planning permission issued by the Secretary of State for the related sites. Without this, affordable housing and other infrastructure such as health care facilities and schools needed to mitigate the impacts of the development would not be secured if planning permission was granted. The Council has secured legal

	representation in putting forward the Council's case to the Inquiry for the original Inquiry period. External consultants required as witnesses have been procured through the Council's procurement protocols
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	The Council's case to the Inquiry being agreed would mean development in the countryside and harmful ecological impacts are avoided. Should the Secretary of State grant permission it is important that adequate conditions and planning obligations are secured to mitigate the impacts of the development (including reductions in carbon emissions).
Health and Wellbeing	The Council's case to the Inquiry being agreed would help to direct development to more sustainable locations. Should the Secretary of State grant permission it is important that adequate conditions and planning obligations are secured to mitigate the impacts of the development (including securing sports facilities, open space and ensuring provision is made for additional health care facilities to meet the demands of the development)
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Robustly putting forward the Council's case to the Inquiry reduces the risks associated with costs associated with unreasonable behaviour (which can be awarded where reasons for refusal are not defended). Should the Secretary of State grant permission it is important that adequate conditions and planning obligations are secured to mitigate the impacts of the development, including remediation of contaminants.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage.
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications identified at this stage.

## 7. Appendices

- 7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:  
Appendix I **EXEMPT**: Additional Highsted Inquiry Costs – Options and Estimates.

## 8. Background Papers

- 8.1 Reports to the Planning Committee – [7th November 2024](#)
- 8.2 Report to the Urgent Decisions Committee – [20th December 2024](#)