

TITLE OF REPORT: STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, HOUSING AND ENTERPRISE
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR DAVID LEVETT

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report informs Members of the current positions regarding:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment update;
- Stevenage Local Plan consultation;
- Government announcements; and
- North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the report on strategic planning matters be noted.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Not applicable.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enterprise has been kept informed on the matters set out above.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 Members will be aware of, and familiar with, many of the issues surrounding the strategic planning matters referred to in paragraph 1.1 above. This report is intended to provide Members with the current positions on these matters.

8. ISSUES

Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update

8.1 As reported to the Cabinet meeting on 16 June 2015, the Council has been working on an update to the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). This SHMA was jointly commissioned by North Hertfordshire District Council and Stevenage Borough Council and was undertaken by Opinion Research Services.

- 8.2 The final SHMA report is now available at: <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-emerging-policy/evidence-base>
- 8.3 The study has concluded that the objectively assessed need for housing attributable to North Hertfordshire is 14,400 dwellings over the period 2011-2031. This is higher than was assessed in the previous SHMA of January 2013 which projected 12,100 dwellings for the same period. Most of the increase is due not to demographic changes (although the latest Government figures have been incorporated and verified as part of the study) but due to the new requirement to include an uplift for market signals. This market signals uplift is a new concept, introduced by the Government's Planning Practice Guidance of March 2014.
- 8.4 The figure of 14,400 homes will need to be considered in the preparation of the Local Plan. It does not automatically follow that it will be the housing target for the plan, as it will need to be tested against the policies of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), notably through the sustainability appraisal process.
- 8.5 It is also important to note that this figure of 14,400 is solely for needs attributable to the administrative area of North Hertfordshire under the NPPF's methodology. It makes no allowance for needs arising from the other housing market areas affecting North Hertfordshire. Officers anticipate there will be a continuing need for authorities within the Luton housing market area to contribute towards needs that Luton itself is unable to accommodate. Any such contribution will be in addition to the 14,400 discussed above.
- 8.6 Luton Borough and Central Bedfordshire Councils are in the process of completing their own updated SHMA (also being prepared by Opinion Research Services), the outcome of which will help frame the discussions as to how the needs of Luton may be best addressed. Separately the recently-published travel to work data from the 2011 census is being used to re-examine the housing market areas which function across this area in a study commissioned by Luton, Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes, Aylesbury Vale, Stevenage and North Hertfordshire councils. (The study also looks beyond the area of the commissioning authorities.) Any changes to the extent of housing market areas will also need to be taken into account in ongoing discussions under the duty to co-operate.

Stevenage Local Plan consultation

- 8.7 Following the revised Strategic Housing Market Assessment discussed above, Stevenage Borough Council is conducting a single issue consultation purely on housing numbers for the borough. Stevenage's figures from the SHMA update suggest it needs to accommodate 7,300 dwellings rather than the 5,300 they were previously basing their draft plan upon.
- 8.8 Stevenage is able to accommodate 5,300 dwellings without making any further alterations to its green belt boundaries. Stevenage Borough Council believes it is possible to accommodate 7,300 homes within their administrative boundaries (in fact slightly more – 7,600) but this will necessitate releasing some of the last remaining pieces of green belt land within the borough, to the south-east of the town at Bragbury End and to the north of the town off North Road (the B197).
- 8.9 The current consultation presents two choices:
- A. Keep to the figure previously being considered of 5,300 dwellings so as not to have to amend green belt boundaries but formally ask neighbouring authorities to take the 2,000 shortfall on their objectively assessed need; or

B. Amend the green belt to allow for up to 7,600 dwellings within the borough and thereby meet its own needs. (This is said to be the Borough Council's preferred option.)

- 8.10 The consultation closes on 27 July 2015. A response in support of Option B will be prepared and agreed under the portfolio holder's delegated powers.

Government announcements

- 8.11 On 10 July 2015, the Treasury published a 'productivity plan' called *Fixing the foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation*. This covers a variety of subjects, and includes proposals for a number of reforms to the planning system. In particular, it proposes:

- introducing a 'zonal system' to automatically grant permission for housing on suitable brownfield sites;
- taking tougher action to ensure local plans are put in place, including intervening to arrange for local plans to be written where local authorities are failing to write them quickly enough;
- revisions to compulsory purchase procedures;
- planning powers for the elected mayors of London and Manchester; and
- extending the right to buy to housing association tenants.

- 8.12 The detail of how these reforms are intended to work and how they will be brought in is awaited. On the arrangements for intervening in local plans, the Government has said it will confirm a set deadline by the summer recess for local authorities by which time they expect local authorities to have put local plans in place. It will also publish league tables of local authorities' plan-making progress.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan

- 8.13 The representations made to the Local Plan should be available shortly. They will be placed on the website and information on how to access them will be published in the Members' Information despatches.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Terms of Reference for Cabinet confirm that they should exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority except where functions are reserved by law to the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Strategic Director of Planning, Housing and Enterprise. Final approval of Local Plan documents shall be a matter for Full Council.

- 9.2 Section 110 of the Localism Act 2011 sets out the duty to co-operate between local planning authorities and other prescribed bodies, to maximise the effectiveness in the preparation of development plan and other local development plan documents, so far as they relate to a strategic nature. These bodies should consider if they are able to work together jointly on such matters and must have due regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 No direct risk implications from this report but Sustainable Development of the District and the Local Plan are both Cabinet Top Risks.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1st October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5th April 2011. There is a General duty, described in 12.2, that public bodies must meet, underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.
- 12.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions, give **due regard** to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.3 There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report although individual schemes or considerations hereafter will be subject to appropriate review to ensure they comply with latest equality legislative need.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 As the recommendations made in this report do not constitute a public service contract, the measurement of 'social value' as required by the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 need not be applied, although equalities implications and opportunities are identified in the relevant section at Paragraph 12.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report. Temporary staff have been brought in to assist processing the representations on the Local Plan.

15. CONTACT OFFICERS

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