

TITLE OF REPORT: HITCHIN URBAN TRANSPORT PLAN

REPORT OF THE PROGRAMME AND STRATEGY MANAGER, HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHWAYS

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Hitchin Urban Transport Plan has followed the agreed guidelines for developing Urban Transport Plans in Hertfordshire.
- 1.2 The Hitchin Urban Transport plan has developed a range of schemes that will prepare the town to deal with the existing/ likely issues within the next five (5) years.
- 1.3 The revocation of the Regional Spatial Strategy in July 2010 has resulted in a number of previously outlined development proposals being reconsidered by Districts and Boroughs within Hertfordshire and neighbouring Counties. This uncertainty makes it difficult to assess the impact of proposed development and determine the network changes that will be required beyond the next five (5) years. In this regard, we can only itemise a list of potential schemes that will need to be considered when the development proposals are known to ensure they are valid and feasible. Only then can they be progressed for funding and implementation.
- 1.4 Public Consultation commenced on Monday 6th September 2010 and will run for a six (6) week period ending on Friday 15th October 2010.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 The report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The original Hitchin Urban Transport Plan was published in 1998 having been developed in conjunction with the community led Hitchin Vision initiative. As a result, a number of community based environmental and traffic management schemes have been successfully introduced. However, the plan is not suitable for meeting the current and emerging funding opportunities and transport pressures.
- 3.2 The Northern Hertfordshire Area Transport Plan is the overarching strategy document to cover all the towns in northern Hertfordshire; this document was adopted in November 2004. Hitchin is the third of the five towns to have commenced the development of a new Urban Transportation Plan.

- 3.3 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) have continued to work closely to ensure that all the Urban Transport Plans (UTP) are completed for Northern Hertfordshire within their set timeframes.
- 3.4 In early October 2008, following a competitive tendering process AECOM (formerly Faber Maunsell) was appointed to undertake the development of the Hitchin Urban Transport Plan.
- 3.5 The preparation of a Hitchin UTP is closely linked to the preparation of a Stevenage UTP. A fully calibrated transport model has been developed covering both towns and the countryside areas between them. In the light of the current uncertainty relating to future growth as a result of the revocation of the East of England Plan, it is difficult to assess traffic implications beyond the short term, say during the next 5 years. However, once the future growth targets become clearer, the model can be re-run to test out the implications of various growth options.
- 3.6 In mid November 2009, the Hitchin UTP project team was advised that Luton Borough Council's support for the "current" proposals to develop East of Luton was withdrawn at the Full Council meeting. However, it is clear that it is only the housing element which is no longer supported. The most recent (revised) Core Strategy still includes a strategic employment site, as an extension of Century Park, within North Herts.
- 3.7 As a result of the uncertainty at the time (late 2009), progress on the Hitchin UTP was put on hold until further information became available, as the outcome of Luton Council's decision on future development determines what associated traffic movements and impacts are likely in Hitchin.
- 3.8 The Highways and Joint Member Panel (JMP) was updated at the January 2010 meeting and officers were tasked with providing an update by the April 2010 meeting on a way forward.
- 3.9 A meeting was held between NHDC and HCC officers to discuss the way forward in light of Members concerns about the open ended nature of the UTP delay. A further meeting was convened with AECOM to discuss how the Hitchin UTP will be progressed and the following is proposed to be considered for the Hitchin UTP traffic model:
 - Assumptions about background traffic growth for the whole area as a 'base case' scenario;
 - Assumptions on the impact of current and future traffic volumes on the existing local network which will include growth in Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock;
 - Assumptions on the growth in and around Stevenage and the timings of its delivery, aligned with the SNAP proposals;
 - How growth in Luton and proposed network changes will impact the A505 and A602 in Hitchin as far as can be quantified from the published and revised East of England Plan;
 - The range of growth that can be managed with the existing network;
 - The trigger points for improving the existing road network taking into consideration the proposed housing, employment and infrastructure growth.

Members were advised of this way forward at the April 2010 JMP.

- 3.10 The UTP was being progressed with the assumptions set out in paragraph 3.9, however in July 2010, the current Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government indicated that all Regional Spatial Strategy, including the East of England Plan, were revoked and decisions on the scale and location of new development are passed back to local authorities. This decision has made it difficult to assess the impact of development on the town in the long term (over five years).

4. ISSUES

- 4.1 As part of the data collection exercise to build the computer traffic model a number of Road Side Interviews (RSI) were undertaken on key routes within Hitchin in autumn 2008. The surveys involved cars and light/heavy goods vehicles being stopped and asked a series of questions relating to their journey in order to try and build an accurate picture of the highway travel patterns within the town.
- 4.2 The analysis of the survey data indicated that a large proportion of the trips on the highway network, particularly to the south of Hitchin do not have an origin or destination within the town. This is particularly evident on the A505/A602 corridor with as much as 44% of trips on the network simply travelling through the town. This emphasises the potential impact that growth in areas outside of Hitchin could have on the town, with any increases in trips likely to directly impact Hitchin's highway network.
- 4.3 From the data gathered and analysed from surveys, on site visits and consultation events, the key transport characteristics in Hitchin are considered to be:
- Several heavily trafficked routes (A505, A600 and A602) run through the town which carry a significant proportion of through traffic as well as local traffic;
 - Constrained highway network;
 - Isolated congestion problems at specific locations during the peak hours;
 - Historic core which operates a pedestrianised zone at certain times;
 - Three major bus stop areas located close to the town centre and markets;
 - A recently upgraded rail station to the east of the town centre; a network of pedestrian footways following the highway network with the majority of crossing facilities concentrated on the A600 and A505 routes.
- 4.4 Details about the consultation and where to view the exhibition and documents are attached as Appendix 1. A Full copy of the Hitchin UTP is available in the Members Room or it can be viewed on the HCC website at: www.hertsdirect.org/hitchinutp

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This project is funded jointly by HCC from budgets allocated to Hertfordshire Highways, North Herts area and NHDC from their GAF funding.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Project Management of the project is supplied by Hertfordshire Highways, NHDC and the appointed consultant. Proposals set out within the documents has ensured that access for all road users are considered.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 An Officer and Members Workshop were held in early November 2008 and the Wider Stakeholder event was held on Wednesday 11th February 2009. A number of Member meetings have been held and updates have also been provided via email as and when required. A Members meeting was held on 11th August to present the draft report for public consultation. Public consultation will be held on the draft Hitchin UTP for a six week period from 6th September to 15th October 2010. A copy of the consultation leaflet was delivered to all households on the Royal Mail mailing list at the end of August 2010.
- 8.2 In addition to the documents being available online and a printed copies available at four venues within the town, there will be two manned exhibitions at Hitchin Library as follows:
- Wednesday 29th September, 3.00pm - 8.00pm
 - Saturday 2nd October, 10.00am 1.00pm

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Members are asked to note the progress to date and to provide any comments on the draft report by Friday 15th October 2010 to the Programme and Strategy Manager at Hertfordshire Highways.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To update the Committee on the progress of the Hitchin Urban Transportation Plan and to seek its views.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 11.1 Not applicable

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix 1 Hitchin UTP - Consultation Leaflet

13. CONTACT OFFICERS

13.1 Roxanne Glaud – Programme & Strategy Manager, Hertfordshire Highways

13.2 Simon Young – Transport Policy Officer, North Hertfordshire District Council

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 A draft of the Hitchin UTP is available on the **Website address:** www.hertsdirect.org/hitchinutp and at any of the following locations

- Hitchin Library
- Hitchin Town Hall
- Hitchin Town Centre Managers Office
- North Herts District Council Offices - Letchworth