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Attention: Anushia Vettivelu
Hertfordshire County Council
Highways - Environment and Infrastructure

Our Ref: LP/Tspt/LettNC GTP
Your Ref:
Contact Officer:
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By email

Dear Anushia

North Hertfordshire District Council's response to the North Central Hertfordshire Growth and Transport Plan Stage 3 Interventions Paper - Consultation Draft: January 2020

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the January 2020 North Central Hertfordshire Growth Transport Plan (NC GTP) consultation draft. Our response follows the same broad format as the on-line consultation form and the section headings within the document.

1. Introduction

While reference is made to LTP4, it is not clear what the life span the NC GTP covers, how it aligns with the NHDC emerging Local Plan and the adopted Stevenage BC Local Plan and how this is likely to be monitored and reviewed in light of new growth and development in the area as well as keeping abreast with technological innovations. This is considered important when referencing the wider strategic interventions and their likely impact on the area. Nor is there any mention of how Appendix B setting out the indicative cost range and timescales for the interventions has been prepared and how these are linked to the deliverability of the plan.

3. Visions and Objectives

The NC GTP Vision

Whilst NHDC fully supports and shares the vision outlined in the draft NC GTP, including highlighting recent improvements that have been made to the sustainable transport offer in the GTP area, specifically bus and train services, we feel it is important not to overlook express coach services. The express coach network in Hertfordshire is included in LTP4, however no mention is made in the NC GTP. As such, we feel these should be included, as part of the wider sustainable transport network. It is also felt that reference should be made to how the HCC propose to engage and work in partnership with Government, EEH (England's Economic Heartland), the District and Borough councils, neighbouring local authorities, the rail and bus operators, developers, other transport bodies and organisations in delivering the vision.

Objectives

Whilst NHDC fully supports the six objectives that underpin the vision for the NC GTP, we feel that the following aims for buses, cycling and walking should form part of the overall vision from the outset:

- Consideration should be given to adopting an approach, where minimal bus service levels are provided for all towns and villages, based on population, providing guaranteed and regular connections to the nearest main centres and/or rail station for onward journeys. Whilst this approach may seem radical for Hertfordshire, this would not seem out of place in many comparable European countries, ensuring that all communities, irrespective of size are regularly served by local buses. Surely, in order to realise the full benefits of the vision of the NC GTP and LTP4, a similar step change in provision is required in Hertfordshire, if modal shift, patronage growth, congestion reduction and improvements to air quality are to be achieved. Linked to this, we have some concerns over the absence of any (generic) measures for the rural areas of the District. This includes the areas between / to the south of Baldock and Royston and south-west of Hitchin
- In the same way, adopting an approach that will seek improved, good quality, safe cycle and walking routes provided, connecting all towns and villages to the nearest main centres, again as would be common practice in the Netherlands and Denmark. The work currently being undertaken by NHDC, in producing an LCWIP (Local Cycling Walking and Infrastructure Plan) would be able to feed into this by identifying suitable routes, which can then be prioritised for future investment, leading to a high quality, high specification network of cycleways and footpaths in the GTP area.

Concern is raised over the lack of reference to partnership working and deliverability in these objectives and how these are reflected in prioritising the various interactions, and how these are referenced to appendix B.

4. Method Overview and 5 Prioritising Interactions

As per our comment above, there is lack of reference to partnership working and deliverability in these sections.

6. Proposed Packages

NHDC welcomes the acknowledgement and interest that is demonstrated in the NC GTP, in seeking to understand the future changes in transport use and demand, including:

- *Bus service improvements and the bus priority measures*
- *Improved interchanges between modes*
- *Mobility as a Service, (MaaS)*
- *Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)*
- *Electric Vehicles (EV's)*
- *Connected and Autonomous Vehicles (CAV's)*
- *Car ownership and car clubs*
- *Bike hire schemes*

- *Improved wayfinding*
- *Integrated and smart ticketing*
- *Travel Plans*
- *Joined up approach to future planning and transport*

It is important to understand the potential opportunities and possible challenges each of these policy aspects will likely pose, ensuring a consistent and complementary approach. This will ensure that residents, businesses and visitors are able to enjoy the benefits of all these transport schemes.

It should also be noted that several emerging NHDC strategies, including the North Hertfordshire Transport Strategy, LCWIP and Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy, are consistent with these aspirations outlined in the NC GTP. As such we would welcome ongoing opportunities to work with HCC, Government, EEH, the District and Borough councils, neighbouring local authorities, the rail and bus operators, developers, other transport bodies and organisations to ensure a consistent approach, both in the policy development and scheme delivery. Further, NHDC will always welcome opportunities to work with HCC and other partners to see pilot schemes undertaken in the District, that will seek to understand the potential for the full range of sustainable transport measures.

Strategic Interventions

While we welcome reference to the wider strategic projects that are likely to impact on the area, the section on '*Luton Airport Expansion*', requires updating in light of the recent proposals by LLAL to increase passenger numbers to 32mppa by 2050. This relates back to the point made above regarding the life span of this plan. Likewise, the section on the '*A505 and Major Road Network*', it is suggested that reference is made to the Royston to Granta Park study. It is suggested that HCC may wish to review the interventions listed in this section along with figure 8 to ensure that the NC GTP reflects the current status of these projects at the time of publication.

Proposals

Sustainable Travel Towns

We welcome the commitment given to the Sustainable Travel Town concept, where possible we will look to work with local communities and HCC to support all the main towns, in the GTP area in North Hertfordshire, adopting this approach, for the recognised benefits that can be derived. Already, NHDC is supporting proposals for Letchworth Garden City and Royston to become Sustainable Travel Towns with local partners.

Area Wide Interventions

Whilst fully supporting all the measures listed in the Area Wide Interventions, we would also like to propose that the concept of undertaking car free days, as part of international car free day initiative, that is championed by Living Streets in the UK, as a further way to promote and encourage sustainable transport in the towns in the GTP area.

Packages

NHDC welcomes and generally supports all 15 packages listed in the NC GTP and wishes to make comments on the following:

Stevenage – key connections to other towns

Package 6 - Stevenage to Letchworth

We support proposals for changes to the highway layout on Knebworth High Street (B197 London Road), due to the delays caused to local bus services caused by car parking on both sides of the road in this area. We would also like to see more detail given in the supporting text to Scheme SM93 regarding improvements to pedestrian and cycle links under the railway bridge to the station and to the centre of the village from the new developments at KB1, KB2, KB3 and KB4.

We support proposals for the B197 corridor between Stevenage and Welwyn and consider these should be replicated to the north of Stevenage along this route to Baldock.

We also feel we should highlight the issue of the planned closers on the A1(M), due to the proposed upgrades by Highways England, to install all lanes running, (Smart Motorways). This will affect the A1(M) between junctions 6 and 7, in both directions, which will see traffic diverted via the B197 which will heavily impact on Knebworth. It is important that consideration and possible mitigation measures be identified now, to keep any disruption to a minimum. In order to fully realise the potential benefits outlined in this package, specifically bus services, it will be crucial for any complementary measures in Luton to be delivered concurrently as referenced in Package 5. We would encourage officers at HCC to work with colleagues at Luton Borough Council and the bus operators, to ensure that a consistent approach to bus priority measures are undertaken, to ensure the smooth operation of routes 100/101 (Luton – Hitchin – Stevenage) throughout the journey.

In taking forward detailed scheme design(s) for cycle routes from Stevenage to Little Wymondley and Hitchin, consideration should be given to using existing connections via Todds Green to avoid conflict at Junction 8 of the A1(M).

Equally with regards to cycling, we would like to see consideration given to improving the existing cycle route between Luton and Hitchin be included as well. Currently a sign posted route, using a combination of off-road and on-road, we would argue that there is the opportunity here to consider investigating the potential for a new bespoke high specification cycle route, to encourage inter-urban cycling between the two towns. As is increasingly being seen in London with the introduction of 'cycle superhighways' and is growing in popularity in comparable European countries, we feel strongly that such an approach should be considered here.

Hitchin

Package 7 - Hitchin Centre Including Rail Station

We especially welcome and strongly support HCC's commitment to work with partners to seek to deliver a new eastern entrance to Hitchin Station, including pedestrian connectivity through the Station. With the planned new housing developments in the east of the town, including HT1 (Highover Farm), where 700 homes are planned, plus other smaller development sites, there will be growing pressure on access to the station. Already, the A505 and footway under the railway bridge adjacent to the station are a bottleneck, due to the limited space available. This situation is only likely to be exasperated, and realistically it is unlikely that the road can be widened and/or an additional footway added, unless at substantial cost and disruption.

Package 8 – North Hitchin and Industrial estate

Figure 16 needs to show indicative links/reference for cycle routes and bus routes to site HT1 (note: this is incorrectly labelled as site H1 in the document).

Package 9 – West Hitchin

At PR5 – there is also the potential for a cycle link from site HT1 to Letchworth to link in with the Letchworth Greenway, this option could be referenced in the text.

Package 10 - Hitchin to Letchworth/Baldock

We strongly support the proposals contained in this Package to enhance cycling infrastructure between Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock; building upon our comments to Package 6, we would like see consideration given to the introduction of bespoke, high specification cycle route introduced connecting the three towns. As has been identified in the overarching aim of the Package, the potential for encouraging journeys to be made between the towns is encouraging, given the short distance and direct route, which should be considered a great opportunity.

Further we would welcome the introduction of a cycle hub being introduced at Hitchin Station, as a further measure to support and encourage the take up of cycling in the town and surrounding area. As comparable examples for consideration we would cite the current cycle hubs at Watford, Dacorum, Leavesden and Stevenage elsewhere in Hertfordshire. It would be a welcome development to see a similar hub established at Hitchin Station, as such NHDC would welcome the opportunity work with HCC, Network Rail, Govia Thameslink, local stakeholders and the cycle hub provider to realise this.

Letchworth

Package 11 – Letchworth Centre and Industrial Estate

NHDC would like to see consideration given to improving pedestrian and cycle access within the Letchworth Industrial estate, including crossing points, particularly given the recent Aldi development at Avenue One and how these link to the North Herts Leisure Centre on the B656 and to the retail park at Third Avenue.

Baldock

Package 13 – Baldock connectivity, rail station and development.

Scheme SM103 makes reference to Baldock multimodal link roads. In the table this makes reference to a new strategic link as apart of the proposed BA1 site, yet in the supporting text reference is also made to sites BA2, BA3 and BA4. Clarity is sought as to what is meant by the term 'roads' and should be referenced accordingly in figure 21. Please note that the Council has proposed amendments to the boundaries of sites BA3 and BA4 which should be reflected for consistency. The employment site BA10 should be referenced in relevant diagrams and discussion as this will generate additional trips to, from and within the town.

The Council notes the opportunity for Baldock to become a more integrated sustainable town and would wish to work with HCC in exploring these opportunities, including the potential for the section of the A507 between the B656/A507 crossroads and the A505 to become a predominantly residential street.

Royston Connections

Package 15 - Royston

We strongly support the proposals contained in this Package to enhance the range and encourage the take-up of sustainable transport options, for journeys both within Royston and for interurban journeys. In addition to those already included we would like to see consideration be given to the following proposals:

- Bringing into public use the existing private farm bridge over the A505, including the hardened farm tracks either side of the bridge, to provide a new shared footpath and cycleway between Royston and Bassingbourn. This route has previously been proposed by Sustrans in their Royston Area Feasibility Study, (2014). This link would also significantly improve connectivity between the Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire Rights of Way networks and provide greater choice for leisure activities, helping to address concerns over recreational impacts on Therfield Heath.
- That consideration be given to understanding potential sustainable transport options for journeys to destinations to the east of Royston to neighbouring villages. Whilst the potential for encouraging cycling trips towards Cambridge and villages to the north of Royston in Cambridgeshire is included, currently no consideration or mention is given to equivalent destinations to the east of the town, either by bus or cycling.
- Improved bus/rail integration at Royston Train Station; currently the nearest bus stops are located away from the station acting as a disincentive to encourage bus use to/from the station. As such, we would welcome the opportunity to work with HCC, the rail industry, bus operators and local stakeholders to understand and identify ways to improve this.
- We welcome the proposal to improve Royston Bus Station; currently we feel that it is somewhat neglected asset and an unattractive location to wait for a bus and/or coach, (National Express coach services call at the Bus Station as well). Being located adjacent to the high street by the shopping arcade, market, library and community facilities, we envisage that a revitalised bus station, served by all bus routes, could act as a main transport hub and interchange, encouraging further economic development in the town centre. As such, we would welcome the opportunity to work with HCC, bus operators and local stakeholders to design and deliver this scheme.

7: Conclusion

It is suggested that this section should comprise of subheadings to assist the reader, including a 'next steps' heading to make it clear on how the GTP should be taken forward. The plan needs to be clear on who how the GTP should be delivered including reference to Appendix B and setting out a pathway from the packages in this document to the identification of specific schemes to their design and implementation. More detail is required explaining Appendix B – as the list of Interactions are not clear, nor are the timescales, and what is meant by 'if delivered in isolation' as to who would be responsible for the delivery of these packages, how would these be funded. It is the Council's view that we would expect HCC as the Highway Authority to lead on these packages, working in partnership with Government, EEH, NHDC, SBC, neighbouring local authorities, various transport bodies and providers, developers and local organisations. By way of context, the latest infrastructure information submitted to our Local Plan examination identifies approximately £25m to be allocated to transport infrastructure measures. This broad figure has been tested through the examination hearings. The measures for North Hertfordshire in the emerging NC GTP amount to ~£30m - £75m and this 'funding gap' will need to be addressed for the NC GTP is to be effectively implemented

It is unclear whether there are certain trigger points at which individual measures become necessary – in terms of time, quanta of growth or specific development schemes. Some measures may be delivered on-site (such as the link roads at Baldock) or through site-specific s278 works. Other schemes are more likely to be delivered through pooled contributions from multiple sources. Greater clarity is required to enable effective negotiation of planning applications and Section 106 contributions and CIL.

We will need to regularly update our own Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Transport Strategy and associated documents over the lifetime of both the NC GTP and our own Local Plan. We would welcome an ongoing dialogue on these matters to ensure that documents and strategies produced by our respective organisations are consistently aligned. We hope that these comments and suggestions are helpful, and we would like to see these being taken into consideration for the final version of the NC GTP; our thanks again for inviting NHDC to be able to provide comments and feedback.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Clark', written in a cursive style.

Cllr Paul Clark
Executive Member for Planning and Transport