

**CABINET
16 MARCH 2021**

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: RESPOND TO CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT / ENABLE AN ENTERPRISING AND CO-OPERATIVE ECONOMY / SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF GOOD QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE HOMES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report identifies the latest position on key planning issues affecting the District.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the report on strategic planning matters be noted.

2.2. That the correspondence in Appendices A and B be noted and endorsed by Cabinet.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters and progress on the North Hertfordshire Local Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Executive Member for Planning and Transport and Deputy have been briefed on the matters set out above. The Local Plan Project Board is regularly consulted and updated upon matters affecting the ongoing Local Plan Examination.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a Key Executive decision and has therefore 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. As with previous reports, only those matters where there has been substantive new information or change are reported upon.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Other Plans and Examinations

- 8.1. **Welwyn Hatfield** – [Hearings on the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan](#) resumed on Monday 22 February 2021 and run until Thursday 18 March 2021. These cover a range of housing issues including objectively assessed need, Green Belt, housing supply and proposed allocations. Any further modifications to the Plan arising from these sessions, including any matters which might impact upon North Hertfordshire such as housing sites close to the shared administrative boundary, will require consultation.
- 8.2. **St Albans** – The Council has published a [Local Development Scheme \(LDS\)](#) – the statutory document setting out a timetable – for its replacement Local Plan. A first consultation is anticipated in early 2022. Early consultation on the joint South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan is anticipated later this year.
- 8.3. **Central Bedfordshire** – Following the resumed hearings in December 2020, [the Inspectors wrote to the Council](#) setting out views on a number of soundness matters and direction on the way forward for the examination. This included clarification on the proposed allocations and policies relating, in particular, to RAF Henlow and Arlesey, both of which are close to the District boundary. Consultation on Main Modifications is anticipated in the Spring.
- 8.4. **East Hertfordshire** – Full Council adopted a [Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\) on Sustainability](#) on 2 March 2021. The proposed approach to this Council's SPDs is subject to a separate report to this meeting.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan

- 8.5. An update on the Local Plan examination and next steps is contained in a separate report to this meeting.

Neighbourhood Plans

- 8.6. It was agreed at Cabinet in January 2021 that the Baldock, Bygrave and Clothall Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to a referendum. This will take place on 6 May 2021.
- 8.7. The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan has been submitted to the local planning authority for public consultation. Consultation will take place until April 15 2021. Once the consultation period has ended, an independent examiner will be appointed in consultation with the Parish Council to undertake an examination of the neighbourhood plan.

Hertfordshire Growth Board and North-East-Central (NEC) Hertfordshire

- 8.8. As part of the Hertfordshire Growth Board work, Councillor Stears-Handscomb is chairing a workstream within the North East and Central Herts Strategic Planning work on Reinvigorating our Town Centres. As well as officers, the steering group includes three of the Leaders of the Hertfordshire Districts and Boroughs as well as representatives of the Local Enterprise Partnership, the County Council and Professor Julie Newlan from the University of Hertfordshire. Evidence has been sought from practitioners in the field and the next stage is a workshop to develop the tools needed to establish the baseline in each of our towns from which to ensure they are able to flourish in the post pandemic world.
- 8.9. Any further updates will be reported verbally to the meeting.

Government announcements

- 8.10. The Government's latest [Housing Delivery Test \(HDT\) results](#) were released in late January 2021. This is a measure of the number of homes delivered against Local Plan targets or, in the absence of an up-to-date Plan, Government estimates of the number of homes required.
- 8.11. The latest results show the Council delivered 36% of the homes considered necessary under this measure. This was down from 44% the previous year. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out a number of steps that authorities should take in response to their HDT results. The latest figures are well below the 75% threshold at which the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' for planning applications is to be applied. It will also be necessary to update [the HDT Action Plan approved by Cabinet in June 2020](#). This will be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet. The latest result for North Hertfordshire was the fourth-lowest figure of almost 300 local authorities in the country.
- 8.12. Following release of the results, the Housing Minister Christopher Pincher MP has written to all authorities and also specifically enquired about the reasons for North Hertfordshire's low results via the Rt. Hon Sir Oliver Heald QC, Member of Parliament for North East Hertfordshire. The Executive Member's letter to Sir Oliver is attached as Appendix A.
- 8.13. This recognises that significant improvement upon the HDT measure will only be achieved on resolution of the current Local Plan examination. However, it reinforces the need to ensure measures in the current Action Plan are being delivered upon. As set out above, the proposed next steps in relation to both the examination and implementation of the Local Plan are subject to separate reports to this meeting.
- 8.14. The Government has outlined its [long-term ambition for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc](#). This includes developing a spatial framework for the area to support accelerated economic growth and housing delivery and consideration of a Growth Body to drive these programmes. North Hertfordshire borders the Arc along its boundaries with Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire. Officers will keep emerging proposals under review.
- 8.15. The Government has made a number of further announcements relating to good design and the Future Homes standard. These are set out in Section 7 of the Local Plan implementation report and are not repeated here.

- 8.16. In response to the publication of the [National Model Design Code](#), the Council submitted an expression of interest to act as a pilot authority using the proposed new developments around Knebworth as a case study. Outcomes are due to be announced during the week commencing 8th March and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

London Luton Airport

- 8.17. Officer meetings regarding the proposed expansion for London Luton Airport (LLA) are continuing. As previously advised, LLAL continue to [state on their website](#) that they are expecting to submit their Development Consent Order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate in 2021.
- 8.18. A response to the proposed changes to LLA arrivals airspace consultation which concluded on 5 February 2021 was sent following consultation with HCC and the Executive Member and Deputy. A copy is attached at Appendix B.

Other transport, planning and infrastructure matters

- 8.19. **LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan)** – NHDC and HCC are currently in the process of producing an LCWIP for the District; LCWIP's were identified in the DfT's first Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (2017) as a new strategic approach to identifying cycling and walking improvements at a local level. By having an adopted LCWIP this will enable both NHDC and HCC to be in a stronger position to bid for any future Government funding opportunities. Work commenced in December 2020 and it is anticipated to be completed in Autumn 2021, with an officer working group meeting fortnightly.
- 8.20. **Active Travel Fund** – HCC are currently consulting on a series of proposed Active Travel Schemes following the award of £6.4m funding from the DfT. The schemes are intended to improve cycling and walking facilities across Hertfordshire. One of the proposals for a scheme in Stevenage partly comes into North Hertfordshire, the location being between Stevenage Old Town and Graveley Road. If completed this is likely to see a new separated cycleway along the route connecting with the wider cycleway network in Stevenage. The consultation runs between 16 February and 15 March 2021, NHDC officers will provide comments to the consultation.
- 8.21. **Hitchin Intalink Feasibility Study** – as part of the Intalink Enhanced Partnership, which was launched in April 2020, HCC via the Intalink Partnership commit to undertaking three feasibility studies per year to identify bus priority measures either in town centres or corridors. In 2020/21 Watford, St. Albans and Stevenage were chosen; for 2021/22 Hitchin has been one of the locations chosen. Each study is anticipated to last for three-four years, with scheme improvements identified in the first year, with subsequent years covering design and delivery. HCC has established a working group for the Hitchin feasibility study and NHDC officers recently met with them to discuss outline proposals prior to the commencement of more detailed work.

- 8.22. **DfT Rural Mobility Fund** – a final decision is expected by the end of March from the DfT as to the application for funding for a new DRT (Demand Responsive Transport) bus service that was submitted by HCC, in partnership with NHDC, East Herts. District Council and Stevenage Borough Council. The application process is a two-phase process and was one of three applications submitted by HCC but was the only one to be shortlisted for phase 2. If successful, the North East Herts DRT service will provide a step change in local bus provision for a large number of villages and hamlets in the proposed area of operation across North and East Hertfordshire, currently served either by limited bus services or none at all.
- 8.23. **Sustainable Travel Towns** – the officer working group's for both the Letchworth Garden City and Royston Sustainable Travel Town's schemes are continuing to meet on a fortnightly basis to develop high level action plans that will be submitted for final approval to HCC's Growth, Infrastructure, Planning and the Economy Panel in July.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters, applications for, approval/designation, consultation/referendums revocations (or recommend revocation) of neighbourhood plans and orders, (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).
- 9.2. The preparation of statutory plans is guided by a range of acts and associated regulations including the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Localism Act 2011. All local planning authorities are bound by a statutory Duty to Co-operate on cross-border planner matters.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no new financial implications arising from this report. The costs of preparing the Local Plan and running the examination are reviewed on a regular basis and are reported through the quarterly revenue monitoring reports to Cabinet.
- 10.2. The general costs of preparing Supplementary Planning Documents, responding to consultations on neighbouring authorities' Plans, neighbourhood plans and Government consultations and the other activities identified in this report are met through existing revenue budgets or benefit from external funding or other arrangements to recover costs.
- 10.3. In previous financial years, funding has been available for local planning authorities (LPAs) in respect of neighbourhood planning. LPAs could claim £20,000 once a date has been set for a referendum following a successful examination. The [Government has announced](#) it will allow local planning authorities to submit claims for new burdens grants at an earlier point in the neighbourhood planning process in 2020/21. Claims will be able to be made when the Council announces its decision to send the plan to referendum.
- 10.4. The financial risks associated with planning were reviewed and updated as part of the budget-setting cycle for 2020/21. Risks are identified in relation to potential additional costs associated with progressing the Plan or any future challenge to it.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Sustainable Development of the District and the Local Plan are both Corporate Risks. The Sustainable Development of the District has a sub-risk that covers the risks arising from the duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their 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.
- 12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report. Future individual schemes or considerations may well be subject to appropriate review to ensure they comply with latest equality legislative need. Any risks and opportunities identified will also be subject to assessment for impact on those that share a protected characteristic.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report. Workload and vacancies are monitored on an on-going basis.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1. Appendix A – Letter from Cllr Clark to Rt. Hon. Sir Oliver Heald QC MP
- 16.2. Appendix B – NHDC response to Luton Airport arrivals airspace consultation

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None