

**CABINET**

**14 November 2023**

**PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF REPORT: STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS**

REPORT OF: IAN FULLSTONE, SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR RUTH BROWN, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

2.2. That the Planning Reforms responses from North Herts and HIPP, attached as Appendices A and B be endorsed.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

**4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

4.1. None

**5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

5.1. The Executive Member and Deputy have been briefed on the relevant matters in this report. The Strategic Planning Project Board meet approximately monthly to guide and monitor progress on major development sites and key planning issues in the District. More information is contained in the report.

## 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

### **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

#### **North Herts Local Plan**

- 8.1. The new Local Plan was adopted by Full Council on 8 November 2022. Policy IMR2: Local Plan Early Review commits the Council to undertake work on a whole plan review of the 2011 – 2031 Local Plan by the end of 2023.
- 8.2. The purpose of Policy IMR2 being to determine whether the adopted Plan needs to be updated, either in whole or in part. Policy IMR2 does not require the Local Plan to be updated and be ready to publicly consult upon in its entirety by the end of 2023. But simply that an assessment (review) of the Local Plan policies needs to be undertaken to determine whether the Council then proceeds to a Plan review either in whole or in part.
- 8.3. The supporting text to Policy IMR2 states that:
- We currently consider it most likely that this review will result in a need to comprehensively update the local plan, recognising that this cannot be prejudged at this time. Our present intention is that any comprehensive review of this Plan will be completed by the mid-2020s at the latest. It will roll the Plan forward to a new time horizon of at least 2041 and deliver any specific additional or updated policies and sites that are identified as being needed.*
- 8.4. At the Full Council meeting to adopt the Plan, Councillors were advised by officers (without prejudice to the review) that it was considered “incredibly unlikely” this process would lead to allocated sites being removed from the Plan. As above, any future iteration of the Local Plan would likely look forward for at least a further ten years beyond the current end date of 2031.
- 8.5. This work has almost been completed and will be presented to Cabinet in January 2024.
- 8.6. The Local Plan Review was published on the Councils Forward Plan on 13 October 2023 with a decision date of 16 January 2024 by Cabinet. The timetable for the production of Cabinet reports requires the publication of the officer recommendations on this matter by 20 December 2023, in line with the ‘end of 2023’ commitment in the Local Plan.
- 8.7. Any review will take place in the context of the Government’s recent enactment of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (see below).

## Supplementary Planning Documents

- 8.8. Following adoption of the Local Plan, focus has turned to its implementation. This includes preparing an appropriate set of supporting Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that were approved by Cabinet in March 2021.
- 8.9. The following targets for presenting versions of these documents to Cabinet have been agreed in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy:

<i>Document</i>	<i>Consultation</i>	<i>Adoption</i>
<b>Sustainability SPD</b>	December 2023	March 2024
<b>Biodiversity SPD</b>	<i>Spring 2024</i>	<i>Summer 2024</i>
<b>Design Code SPD</b>	<i>Summer 2024</i>	<i>Autumn 2024</i>

- 8.10. The Sustainability SPD was discussed at Cabinet Panel on the Environment on 22 February 2023 and the direction of travel for the document was considered and feedback from the Panel was incorporated into the document presentation to Cabinet on 14 March 2023. The draft SPD will be presented at the next meeting of Cabinet following consideration by Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
- 8.11. The timetable for the Biodiversity and Design Code SPDs have been amended in response to Government announcements and staffing capacity (see below).

## Neighbourhood Plans

### *Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan*

- 8.12. The Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan is due to be examined and we are in the process of appointing an examiner to undertake the examination. It is anticipated that this will be by written representations and will commence imminently. If the examination is successful a further report will be brought to Cabinet with a recommendation to proceed to a referendum; with a view to holding the referendum prior to Local Elections in May 2024 and before the Pre-Election Restricted Period (PERP).

### *Wallington Neighbourhood Plan*

- 8.13. Wallington Neighbourhood Plan was consulted upon for a period of six weeks from 18<sup>th</sup> July to 30 August 2023. and summary of responses can be found [here](#). The Neighbourhood Plan is due to be examined and we are in the process of appointing an Examiner in autumn; with a view to holding the referendum prior to Local Elections in May 2024 and before PERP.

## **Conservation Areas**

### *Ashwell and Pirton Conservation Areas*

- 8.14. The updated Conservation Area Appraisal Management Plans for both Ashwell and Pirton were adopted by Council on 27 June 2023. The relevant undertakings have been made to notify the Secretary of State, Historic England and Land Charges and a notification was placed in the London Gazette in accordance with the regulations. In addition, our mapping has been updated for the purposes of Development Management.

### *Chesfield Conservation Area*

- 8.15. Consultation took place on the draft CAAMP and the proposed conservation area at Chesfield for 9 weeks between 16 November 2022 and 16 January 2023. We received a number of responses to the consultation, mainly from local residents. All of the representations are available to view of the [website](#).
- 8.16. The final version of the CAAMP and proposed Conservation Area was taken to Cabinet on 19 September 2023. A decision on designating the conservation area was deferred to clarify the proposed conservation area and to conduct further consultation with residents to ensure the People First priority of the Council was being met. Once that work has been completed a further report will be brought back to Cabinet.

## **Self-Build Register**

- 8.17. The Self-Build Register has been updated once again in line with Regulations. The demand for self and custom housebuilding is measured over a 12-month base period which ends on 31 October each year. This sees the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> Base Period for the Self Build Register. We currently have 422 individuals on the Self Build Register.

## **Brownfield Register**

- 8.18. The Brownfield Register is due to be revised by the end of December 2023. This register provides up-to-date and consistent publicly available information on sites we consider to be appropriate for residential development. We are required to review the register at least once a year.

## **Infrastructure Delivery Plan**

- 8.19. We are in the process of updating the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to reflect the up-to-date position of requirements from stakeholders.

## **Monitoring and five-year supply**

- 8.20. Under the current National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Council had a 'grace period' following adoption of its Local Plan during which Government measures relating to housing delivery and supply did not apply. This expired on 31 October 2023. A revised NPPF is anticipated shortly (see below) which, among other matters, is anticipated to

reintroduce and extend the 'grace period' to potentially cover up to five years from Local Plan adoption. In the meantime, relevant planning decisions and recommendations will have regard to national policies on land supply alongside the Local Plan.

**Article 4 Directions**

- 8.21. The Council confirmed the immediate Article 4 Directions relating to Permitted Development Rights (PDR) allowing the change of use of E Class to C3 (residential) in the District's Town Centres on 13 February 2023.
- 8.22. Following the confirmation, we were contacted by DLUHC requesting additional evidence regarding our decision for the geographical extent and intent of the Directions. This evidence has since been submitted to DLUHC. We have asked the Secretary of State to make some modifications to the Directions, namely, to remove all units currently in C3 (residential use) from the Directions.
- 8.23. A response was received from DLUHC in August 2023 asking for further evidence to justify the inclusion of secondary retail frontages within our Town Centres. Further evidence has been submitted to DLUHC which stresses the importance of our secondary retail frontages and the need to protect it across all Town Centres, but particularly in Baldock where there is no Primary retail frontage and the risk posed by PDR to the viability and vitality of Baldock's core; especially considering the amount of residential development that will be taking place in Baldock c.3,000 additional homes and the needs of these new residents for Town Centre uses in the local area. We await a decision from DLUHC.

**Other Local Plans and Examinations**

- 8.24. North Hertfordshire has eight neighbouring local authorities in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, and Hertfordshire. Officers monitor progress on the local plans for these and other relevant areas and, in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy, make representations at key stages.

Neighbouring Authority	Local Plan Progress
Central Beds	Local Plan Review in progress
East Herts	Local Plan Review was taken to Executive in early October and East Herts have resolved to undertake a full review of their Local Plan
Luton	In the very early stages of Local Plan Review
South Cambs	Greater Cambridgeshire (Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council) Local Plan in progress
St Albans	Local Plan Reg 18 Consultation July to September 2023

<b>Stevenage</b>	Local Plan Review being considered but nothing formally actioned
<b>Uttlesford</b>	Delivery of a new Local Plan proposed for summer 2024
<b>Welwyn Hatfield</b>	<p>The Inspectors report was received on 25 September 2023 and adopted at a meeting of their Council on 12 October 2023. The Plan includes some modifications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amendment to the plan period to one that covers the period 2016-36</li> <li>• Amendments to Policy SP2 to confirm that the Council is committed to undertaking an immediate review of the plan, with a submission date no later than three years after the date that this plan is adopted</li> <li>• Changes to elements of the Centre Services and Facilities chapter to account for the ramifications of the Covid 19 pandemic, the further movement of some retail expenditure from shops to on-line facilities and changes to the Use Classes Order</li> <li>• Updates to the Economy chapter to account for changes in the employment forecasts, employment land supply and to the Use Classes Order</li> <li>• Amendments to the Housing policies to comply with national policy and for effectiveness</li> <li>• Improved requirements and advice concerning development considerations that reflect national policy, in relation to heritage matters, tall buildings, and the quality of new development</li> <li>• Improvements to the policies that affect the delivery of infrastructure, especially that concerned with the delivery of sewage improvements</li> <li>• Clarification that there is a requirement for neighbourhood plans to conform to the strategic policies of Local Plans</li> <li>• A number of other modifications to ensure that the plan is positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy</li> </ul>

8.25. A number of authorities' plans are in early review stages so there is only limited formal activity at present.

## **Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB) and North-East-Central (NEC) Hertfordshire**

- 8.26. The 'NEC' area covers the geographical areas of North Hertfordshire, Stevenage, East Hertfordshire, Welwyn Hatfield, and Broxbourne. The Local Planning Authorities, along with the County Council, are working together to explore potential long-term planning solutions.
- 8.27. Prior + Partners have been appointed to develop a Vision for the NEC area and we are working with them to engage with relevant stakeholders as to the direction of the Vision. Engagement includes work with Members and officers as well as identifying relevant community groups.
- 8.28. Engagement workshops have taken place in September and October with a final workshop scheduled for December. The workshops have been positively received by participants and consultants alike.
- 8.29. We expect the outcomes of the workshops and a draft Vision in early 2024.

## **Active Travel England**

- 8.30. As of 1 June 2023, Active Travel England (ATE) became a statutory consultee on planning applications on all planning applications for developments equal to or exceeding 150 housing units, 7,500 m<sup>2</sup> of floorspace or an area of 5 hectares.
- 8.31. ATE is tasked to assist DfT in "delivering increases in active travel to 50% of all journeys in urban areas":

*ATE will support [DfT's] objectives by driving up standards and the capacity and motivation of local authorities and other organisations providing transport works to deliver active travel infrastructure and provide best practice design standards. It will manage funding for dedicated walking and cycling initiatives and challenge failure by withholding funding for failure to meet standards. It will assess the compliance of schemes in the City Region Sustainable Transport Fund, Roads Investment Strategy 2, the Levelling Up Fund and other significant departmental investments that deliver active travel and prevent funding for schemes that do not meet DfT design guidance. It will offer training and be a repository of best practice guidance for local authorities and developers working to ensure active travel design is embedded in new developments.*

- 8.32. ATE has so far responded to one planning application, for KB4 (Land South Of Watton Road Knebworth Hertfordshire, 23/01552/OP) with a recommendation to defer pending "further assessment, evidence, revisions and/or dialogue as set out in [their] response".
- 8.33. NHDC has sought early engagement with ATE on the Baldock strategic development sites as the challenges with delivering attractive, standards-compliant active travel links between BA1 (north of the railway line) and the town centre are significant.

## **Government announcements**

### *Planning Reforms*

- 8.34. A consultation took place on Planning Reforms and the process of developing Local Plans. We responded to this consultation and our response is attached in Appendix A Whilst

supporting the need for reforms, these need to be appropriate and realistic to the planning process.

- 8.35. The proposed reforms include, but not limited to:
- Making the role and content of plans clearer
  - Speeding up the process for preparing a plan (30 months)
  - Ensuring local communities are engaged
  - Dealing with complexity
  - Making the most of digital technology
- 8.36. The Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Panel (HIPP), membership includes all Executive Members for Planning, submitted a response to the consultation, Appendix B on behalf of the County Council and a number of District authorities including ourselves.
- 8.37. The main concerns in both responses was the resources available to Local Authorities to implement such radical change, including staffing levels and budgets, particularly for digital planning.

#### *Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill*

- 8.38. The [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#) received Royal Assent on 26 October. Once the secondary legislation is passed to bring the provisions of the new act into force, it will:
- impose a compulsory Infrastructure Levy to replace funding currently obtained through Section 106 agreements;
  - introduce revised requirements for Local Plan production;
  - mandate the production of area-wide Design Codes;
  - require North Herts to maintain an Infrastructure Delivery Strategy on which it will spend Infrastructure Levy receipts;
  - enable Hertfordshire and a neighbouring county or unitary authority to apply to become a Combined County Authority, potentially with an elected mayor;
  - streamline some aspects of compulsory purchase and discount “hope value” under certain circumstances;
  - enable [Community Land Auctions](#);
  - pave the way for the creation of urban development corporations; and much else.
- 8.39. The Government has previously outlined its intention to produce a revised version of the NPPF “as soon as the Bill received Royal Assent”.

#### *Biodiversity Net Gain*

- 8.40. The Government has delayed the introduction of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain from November 2023 until January 2024. Detailed guidance was due to be published but, at the time of writing, has not been released. This guidance is required before a decision can be taken on the scope of any Biodiversity SPD which this Council might produce.

### *The Plan for Drivers*

- 8.41. A policy paper [Plan for Drivers](#) was published in on 2 October, the practical implications of which are unclear, especially in relation to future updates to national guidance around 20mph zones, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and “15-minute cities”. It is expected that the King’s Speech on 7 November will include some elements from this plan.

### *Local Transport Plans*

- 8.42. Updated guidance on Local Transport Plans (LTPs), including methodology around Quantifiable Carbon Reductions, now long overdue (transport authorities were expected to submit new LTPs to DfT by spring 2024, which is now unrealistic).

### *Network North Plan*

- 8.43. The Network North plan purportedly reallocates funding from the cancelled phases of HS2 to other transport schemes. The indicative list of schemes does not include any in Hertfordshire. However, there are general commitments to increase funding to repair potholes (£2.8bn in East, South East and South West England), to extend the £2 cap on bus fares until the end of 2024, and to fund accessibility improvements to 100 stations across the country (Govia Thameslink Railway submitted Access for All funding applications last year for Baldock and Knebworth stations, supported by HCC and NHDC).

## **Implementation - Strategic Sites & Masterplanning**

- 8.44. The Strategic Planning Project Board continues to meet regularly. The current status of work on the six, largest Strategic Sites in the Local Plan is summarised below:

Policy SP14: North of Baldock	Pre-application masterplan being prepared under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) <sup>1</sup> with initial public consultation carried out by Urban & Civic in March 2023  Further consultation scheduled for late November and early December
SP15: North of Letchworth	Pre-application masterplan being prepared under PPA. Baseline evidence stage largely complete and moving towards option development for consultation in early 2024
SP16: North of Stevenage	Pre-application masterplan being prepared under PPA. The proposed draft masterplan was presented to the Project Board in May 2023 with public consultation June / July
SP17: Highover Farm, Hitchin	This application has now received a resolution to permit by the Planning Committee subject to S106

<sup>1</sup> This work also includes the sites allocated in the Local Plan around Baldock to the south of the railway line known as BA2, BA3 and BA10.

SP18: North-east of Great Ashby	Pre-application masterplan being prepared under PPA. Currently at baseline evidence stage
SP19: East of Luton	Allocation-wide masterplan being prepared under PPA

- 8.45. Other masterplans for significant sites are being progressed through a variety of PPAs, pre-application discussions and current planning applications lodged with the Council ([Masterplans in current applications | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)).

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROJECTS**

### **Luton Airport S73 19mppa Application**

- 8.46. On 13 October 2023, the Secretaries of State at DLUHC and DfT have jointly approved the Section 77 planning application to expand the operating capacity of London Luton Airport from 18 to 19 million passengers per annum:

*“We recommend that full planning permission be granted for dualling of the airport way/approach road and associated junction improvements, extensions and alterations to the terminal buildings, erection of new departures/arrivals pier and walkway, erection of a pedestrian link building from the short-term car park to the terminal, extensions and alterations to the mid-term and long-term car parks, construction of a new parallel taxiway, extensions to the existing taxiway parallel to the runway, extensions to existing aircraft parking aprons, improvements to ancillary infrastructure including access and drainage, and demolition of existing structures and enabling works; and outline planning permission granted for the construction of a multi-storey car park and pedestrian link building, at London Luton Airport, Airport Way, Luton, LU2 9LY, in accordance with the terms of the application Ref 21/00031/VARCON, dated 8 January 2021, subject to the conditions in Annex 1 to this report.”*

- 8.47. The full report may be found at [acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk](http://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk), entering the case number 3296455.

### **Proposed expansion for London Luton Airport**

- 8.48. London Luton Airport Ltd, rebranded as Luton Rising (LR), submitted their application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) involving the expansion of Luton Airport from 18mppa to 32mppa (including a new terminal and associated infrastructure) on 27 February 2023. The application was accepted by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) on 27 March 2023 (the project is defined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project given the proposed passenger numbers). Details can be seen on the PINS website at <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/eastern/london-luton-airport-expansion/>
- 8.49. The Examination process opened on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023 and is expected to close on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

- 8.50. As previously advised, the three Hertfordshire Hosts Authorities, i.e., North Herts Council (NHC), Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) have commissioned specialist technical consultants and a legal team to assist with the preparation and submission of relevant documentation as required by the Examining Authority. These being solicitors from Pinsent & Masons and technical officers from WSP.
- 8.51. The procedure for the Examination process, including submission deadlines and the Issue Specific Hearing Sessions are set out in the Planning Inspectorate's Rule 8 letter (dated 17<sup>th</sup> August 2023) at Annex A, and other subsequent letters. The Rule 8 letter can be viewed at:  
[TR020001-001276-LUTN-Rule-8-and-hearings-notification-letter.pdf](#)  
[\(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](#)
- 8.52. To date the Council, together with the Hertfordshire Host Authorities has submitted the following documentation in accordance with the following Deadlines:
- Deadline 1 – 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> August 2023* – included the preparation and submission of:
- Written Representation setting out the Council's views on the proposals
  - Local Impact Report – setting out what the Council considers to be the main impacts within its boundary
- Deadline 2 – 12 September 2023* – included:
- The preparation and submission of a revised PADSS (Principal Areas of Disagreement Statement)
  - Informing the Examining Authority (ExA) that the Hertfordshire Host Authorities wished to be represented at the Issue Specific Hearings (ISH) which ran from 26 Sept to 29 Sept. The ISH sessions were blended, i.e. where interested parties could attend either in person or virtually.
- Deadline 3 – 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023* - An immediate requirement following the ISHs included:
- Submitting written post hearing submissions of oral cases
  - Submitting an update to the Principal Areas of Disagreement Statements (PADSS) for the Hertfordshire Host authorities
  - Responding to the Applicant's responses to the Hertfordshire Hosts Written Representation and Local Impact Report submitted at Deadline 2.
- 8.53. The ExA issued a Rule 17 Letter on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2023, where the ExA has written to the Applicant and the Host Authorities following a number of oral requests at the ISHs and subsequent written requests regarding changes to a number of deadlines for action points arising out ISHs. In the interests of transparency, the ExA considered that, as these issues are effectively a request for further information, the most appropriate way to respond would be under Rule 17 of the Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedure) Rules 2010. Consequently, the ExA has set out its agreement and proposed timeline for responses on these matters in Annex A to this letter. This letter can be viewed at:  
[TR020001-001835-LUTN-R17-3-October-2023.pdf](#) ([planninginspectorate.gov.uk](#))
- 8.54. One of the key amendments refers to the Statements of Common Ground (SoCGs) where it was considered submitting them at Deadline 3 would be of little assistance to the ExA,

as there were negligible changes to those submitted at Deadline (D)2a and requested instead that updated SoCG be submitted at Deadline 6 i.e. 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

- 8.55. The next Deadline (*Deadline 4*) is 1<sup>st</sup> November 2023 where the Council is required to:
- Respond to a series of Written Questions prepared by the Examining Authority. These have been published on the PINs website at [TR020001-001991-LUTN-ExQ1-FINAL.pdf \(planninginspectorate.gov.uk\)](https://planninginspectorate.gov.uk/TR020001-001991-LUTN-ExQ1-FINAL.pdf)
  - Comment on the Applicant's revised draft DCO (if submitted)
  - Submit any further information requested by the ExA under Rule 17 of the Infrastructure Planning (Examination Procedure) Rules 2010, including submitting a written response to additional questions raised by ExA to the ISHs
  - Submit comments (if consider necessary) on any further information/ submissions received by Deadline 3.
- 8.56. The key areas of concern that have been raised through the process and continue to be point of discussion with the applicant through the SoCG are in relation to a number of factors including (but not limited to) air quality, noise and vibration, traffic and transport, employment and skills, climate change, biodiversity, landscape and visual matters, health and community, and requests for more technical information including the need for more substantive additional engagement and monitoring of the technical requirements of the application.
- 8.57. The ExA issued a Rule 13 letter on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023 informing interested parties of the additional ISHs to be heard from 28<sup>th</sup> November to 1<sup>st</sup> December and would find it helpful for the Hertfordshire Host Authorities to attend the Hearing sessions. The Rule 13 Letter setting out the timescales and topics for discussion at each ISH session can be viewed on the PINs website at:  
<https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/document/TR020001-002031>
- 8.58. The Council will continue to work together with its specialist consultants and the other Hertfordshire Host Authorities in seeking to respond and provide information as requested by the ExA and participating at the upcoming ISH sessions. The Council will continue to meet with the Applicant in seeking to resolve the various issues raised in the PADSS and through the SoCG.
- 8.59. All written submission documents can be viewed on the PINS website at 30
- 8.60. Officers will continue to keep members updated via this Strategic Planning Matters Report and through MIS notes. To date four MIS notes have been issued.

### **LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan)**

- 8.61. The North Herts LCWIP was adopted by HCC on 18 September 2023.

### **Sustainable Travel Towns (STT)**

- 8.62. As previously reported, the Officer Working Groups (OWGs) for the Letchworth and Royston STTs are meeting monthly to identify and progress key projects for inclusion in the implementation plans for each town. The Joint Member Steering Groups for each town are

also now meeting regularly to monitor progress and agree key stages in the development of the plans. Although a small amount of funding has been identified for delivery of these plans, substantially more funding will be required, and has yet to be identified, for infrastructure elements in the plan.

### **HCC Place & Movement Planning and Design Guide**

- 8.63. HCC is reviewing responses to the consultation on the Place & Movement Planning and Design Guide, which will supersede the 2011 *Roads in Hertfordshire – Highway Design Guide*. NHDC officers submitted a detailed response to the consultation. The final guide is expected to come to the HCC Highways and Transport Cabinet Panel in February 2024.

### **HCC Active Travel Strategy**

- 8.64. HCC is preparing the consultation report and amended Active Travel Strategy with the aim of bringing them to the HCC Highways & Transport Cabinet Panel in February 2024. This will supersede the 2013 strategy. NHDC officers submitted a detailed response to the consultation.

### **Active Travel Fund Tranche 4**

- 8.65. HCC was awarded a further £4.6m by Active Travel England to deliver new walking and cycling schemes. In North Herts, some of this funding has been allocated to a recently completed scheme: a new crossing facility on Norton Road in Letchworth, close to the junction with Croft Lane. This was called for by local members and residents to improve safety for children walking to and from Norton St Nicholas primary school.
- 8.66. Although no further capital funding has been allocated to North Herts, some of the Capability Funding is being used to fund further studies of schemes in the LCWIP, the next step before securing funding for delivery.

### **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)**

- 8.67. The government awarded £29.7m to HCC over two years to deliver its BSIP. £13.2m is for capital schemes. £16.5m is revenue funding.
- 8.68. For North Hertfordshire residents, the main benefits are reduced fares from 29 September 2023:
- All multi-operator tickets (Intalink Explorer and BUSnet) reduced by 15%, making them comparable to single-operator day and season tickets
  - The SaverCard Plus for 20–25-year-olds has been extended and offers a 50% discount on most adult fares
  - The Senior SaverCard for 60–66-year-olds provides a 50% discount on most bus fares
  - The Adult SaverCard for 26–59-year-olds provides a 15% discount on Intalink Explorer, BUSnet and Colney 7 bus fares

- 8.69. There is a plan to create a BUSnet scheme in North Hertfordshire, which would provide reduced fares for daily travel on buses operated by different operators within a defined region.
- 8.70. Capital funding will be used to deliver bus priority schemes, including potentially in Hitchin; to roll out Real Time Passenger Information displays at more bus stops; and to install new electronic information points in Hitchin (St Mary's Square), Letchworth (Broadway) and Baldock (Market Place).
- 8.71. Some BSIP funding will be used to market bus services and initiatives to widen awareness and increase patronage.
- 8.72. The HertsLynx demand-responsive service now operates 8pm to 11:30pm on Fridays and Saturdays. (Daytime operating hours are 7am to 7pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 4pm on Sundays.).
- 8.73. The Department for Transport has extended until December 2024 the subsidy to cap single bus fares at £2. This cap applies to most scheduled services and HertsLynx. Note that Richmond Coaches, A2B,C G Myall and Vectare are *not* participating in this scheme. These companies operate all the services in Royston except the Centrebus 26 to Cambridge.

### **County-wide Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Strategy**

- 8.74. The HCC Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy was adopted on 18 September 2023.
- 8.75. The government has provisionally awarded HCC £6.6m from the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund to roll out more chargepoints, primarily for use by residents. This funding will be made available by April 2024.
- 8.76. Although the market is delivering rapid chargers at destination locations, there is still a market failure in delivering chargers that are convenient for residents who do not have off-street parking, and who need access to "fast" (up to 22kW) chargers to use overnight or for extended periods during the day.
- 8.77. NHDC is assisting HCC in writing a business case for funding to be allocated to North Hertfordshire. It is estimated that this funding will help delivery of around 50–100 new EV chargepoints in up to around 25 locations. Terraced housing in rural and outer urban locations will be a focus in selecting sites.

### **EV chargepoints in North Herts car parks**

- 8.78. Following notification from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) in September 2023 that NHDC had been successful in its bid for £135,000 to support the roll-out of 18 chargepoints (36 sockets) in council car parks, officers have been working to finalise the contract with Blink Charging to install, manage and maintain new and replacement chargepoints in:
  - Letchworth (Hillshott CP and the Garden Square MSCP)
  - Hitchin (Bancroft Recreation CP, Woodside CP and the Lairage MSCP)
  - Baldock (Twitchell CP)

- Royston (The Warren CP and Town Hall/Civic Centre CP)

### **Greater Cambridge Sustainable Travel Zone**

- 8.79. The plan to introduce a 'Sustainable Travel Zone' charge to drive in Cambridge has been halted following a withdrawal of political support in September, formalised at the Executive Board meeting on 29 September. The reworked plan put to members would have funded a more modest expansion in bus services in the Cambridge travel-to-work zone than originally planned but would still have incentivised many people to switch from driving to using public transport and active travel.
- 8.80. It is unlikely that a similar plan will come forward again before the general election in 2024.

### **A505 Royston–Granta Park Study**

- 8.81. Cambridgeshire County Council has un-paused work on the A505 Royston-to-Granta Park Study. The consultants working on this, Stantec, presented the shortlisted packages of options to members in the study area on 23 October 2023.
- 8.82. Two notable changes in the context for this study are decisions by the Greater Cambridge Partnership to fund the bridge over that A505 at the A10 junction as part of the Melbourn Greenway scheme; and to defund the Cambridge South East Transport busway scheme, which would link the Cambridge Biomedical Campus with a Park & Ride at the A11 junction with the A1037 near Babraham. Alternative funding sources are being sought for the ~£150m construction cost.

## **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 and supporting documents 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.
- 9.3. Under the Council's Constitution (14.6.10 (b) vii B) all functions relating to National Infrastructure Planning including co-ordination of the Council's response to any consultation, examination or other any other matter concerned with major infrastructure projects, is delegated to the Service Director Regulatory.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. 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.

- 10.2. The report refers to Planning Performance Agreements for Masterplans. Although these represent a relatively new process and income stream, they do not necessarily represent additional monies to the Council at this stage. Prior to the introduction of masterplanning requirements, the negotiation of significant planning applications would have taken place under the Council's charged pre-application advice service and / or through the planning application. This will continue to be the case in some instances. Planning application fees are set nationally. The Council sets local income targets for pre-application advice and planning applications to inform budgeting and budget monitoring.
- 10.3. Income from PPAs will, in the short term at least, reflect a displacement of potential income from the above. Officers are monitoring anticipated and actual PPA income and the relationship between PPA, pre-application and planning application income. This is reflected as required in budget monitoring and / or reporting on targets during 2023/24. PPA income may be used to offset any shortfalls in the other income streams.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1. The Council changed how it sets and monitors risks during 2022. This has seen a shift to strategic risks based on key projects such as the Local Plan and masterplanning. At the time, it was concluded that it was best to revisit these risks following adoption of the Local Plan and expiration of the challenge period for any Judicial Review.
- 11.2. The relevant risks associated with the Local Plan will now be reviewed and updated with the Performance & Risk team. This will reflect the new approach to setting and monitoring Corporate Risks.

## **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. A number of the schemes noted at section 8 will have considerable impact on the environment as they come to fruition. Many of these will be subject to their own statutory

requirements for environmental assessment such as Sustainability Appraisal or Environmental Impact Assessment. The need for further assessment, for example where there is no statutory requirement, is considered on a case-by-case basis.

## **15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 15.1. The number and structure of posts across the planning service has been reviewed on an ongoing basis in recent years with additional positions added to the establishment through annual budget cycles. However, recruitment and retention to professional posts remains extremely challenging. Some posts are presently filled by temporary or fixed-term staff and there remains an ongoing turnover of staff. The service is currently operating below its full establishment. This inevitably impacts upon the ability to address the diverse range of projects and requirements that fall within its scope.

## **16. APPENDICES (to be added at final reports)**

- 16.1. Appendix A – [NHC response to Planning Reforms](#)  
16.2. Appendix B – [HIPP response to Planning Reforms](#)

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**18. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

18.1 None