

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 March 2025

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: PLANNING & TRANSPORT PORTFOLIO UPDATE

REPORT OF: IAN FULLSTONE: SERVICE DIRECTOR REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DANIEL ALLEN: INTERIM EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide the Committee with an update on the Planning and Transport Portfolio.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the report and appendices.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. This report is following the request of the Committee for an update on the Planning and Transport portfolio.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The interim Executive Member is kept updated and briefed on the Planning & Transport Portfolio. Shadow executives are invited to attend briefings quarterly and a PowerPoint presentation is circulated after the meeting for dissemination to the Groups.

5.2. A Strategic Planning Project Board provides strategic advice with regard key strategic planning workstreams including masterplanning, town centre strategies and the review of the Local Plan. The Project Board is represented by the Executive Member and Shadows from the Planning & Transport and Environment Portfolios. Ward Councillors are also invited to attend where appropriate such as with strategic site masterplans.

5.3. Consultation with external organisations and the public are undertaken where necessary such as with neighbourhood planning, local plan, parking management, town centre strategy.

- 5.4. The regular Strategic Planning report to Cabinet provides updates on key projects. Briefing notes are also placed in MIS for Members awareness such as around the new parking machines and transport matters.

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. The Executive Member and Service Director have been asked to provide an update on the Planning & Transport portfolio. The Portfolio falls within the Regulatory Directorate and encompasses the following service areas:

- a. Development Management & Conservation: primary role is planning and listed building applications and associated s106 obligations and enforcement functions
- b. Strategic Planning: primary role is delivery and review of the Local Plan, masterplanning and neighbourhood planning
- c. Strategic Infrastructure and Projects: primary roles include parking policy and management including enforcement, resident/public electric vehicle charging, town centre strategies, town centre masterplanning and sustainable infrastructure.

The Regulatory Director also represents the client side of the building control consortium with 7 other Hertfordshire authorities and is the shareholders (Cabinet Sub-Committee) representative.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. The format of the report will follow the key lines of enquiry requested by the Chair of the Committee.

8.2 Strategy:

- 8.2.1 The Council Plan 2024 - 2028 is the key document that sets out the strategic objectives for the Council and each Portfolio. The Planning & Transport Portfolio plays a key role in the delivery of the Council Plan ambitions of Responsible Growth and Sustainability which includes the achievements and delivery of the following:

- a. The implementation of the adopted Local Plan, including masterplanning
- b. The review of the Local Plan
- c. Publication of the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document
- d. Publication of the Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document
- e. Working with the Hertfordshire Growth Board to launch the Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter
- f. Implementing Biodiversity net gain legislation
- g. Development of and implementing a Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
- h. Development of Town Centre Strategies
- i. Implementation of Pay on Exit parking in all our car parks

j. Resident and Public electric vehicle charging in our car parks.

8.2.2 The Regulatory directorate also has its own Service Plan reviewed each year; Appendix A has a copy of the 24/25 Service Plan. Although throughout the year new opportunities arise and where appropriate in consultation with the Executive Member these are taken forward, however this does mean that other workstreams and projects have to be delayed. Within the Service Plan are projects that do not specifically feature within the Council Plan or its Delivery Plan:

- a. Representing the Council with regard internal, adjoining and surrounding planning issues, such as, the North East Central Planning Group. Members will be aware of the briefing sessions held with regard the consultation that ended last month on the proposed Vision.
- b. Review of the Development Management service to maximise resources including the use of Artificial Intelligence.
- c. Hitchin Eastern Access working with HCC (Highway Authority and Local Transport Authority) to improve active travel links to Hitchin Station. In discussion with Network Rail to consider various options/links to the station from the east and new options to provide walking and cycling access to the existing western station entrance
- d. Luton Airport expansion application, responding to on-going requests from the Secretary of State following the Inspectorate’s consideration of the scheme, with a decision expected on 03 April 2025.
- e. Parking Strategy review – including a review of the current permit parking policy to respond to emerging demands for new types of permits, addressing anomalies with administering current permits, whilst effectively managing parking resources, this is on the forward plan for June.

8.3 Budget/Headcount/Key Suppliers

Budget:

8.3.1 The current revenue budget as approved at Quarter 2 for the Regulatory directorate for 2024/25 is as follows:

Services	2024/25 Budget
Regulatory Services Directorate Management	138,900.00
Building Control	86,900.00
Highways	17,600.00
Parking Services	-1,023,300.00
Planning Control	433,100.00
Planning Policy Administration	854,600.00
Planning Policy Projects	1,143,900.00
Planning Technical Support	269,300.00
Total Regulatory	1,921,000.00

8.3.2 The current capital budget as approved at Quarter 2 for the Regulatory directorate for 2024/25 is as follows:

Capital Project	Budget 2024/25 £'000
Parking Machines Replacement	291
Parking Charging, Payments & Management	235
Match funding for Electric Vehicle Charging	100
Parking Machines Upgrade - Contactless Payment Facility Installation	56

Headcount:

8.3.3 The staffing arrangement through structure charts is shown in Appendices B (Development Management), C (Strategic Planning) and D (Strategic Projects & Infrastructure). Members will be aware of the growth bids within the budget which are not shown on the structure charts.

Key Suppliers:

8.3.4 Development Management: the structure of the team was established prior to the adoption of the Local Plan as such in order to facilitate the major project applications such as the strategic sites, agency staff are procured. Various agencies are approached when staff are required, and the best worker is selected. Agency staff are expensive, and no budget exists for these staff, therefore Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are utilised whereby the applicant covers the costs of these agency staff.

8.3.5 Strategic Planning: as with Development Management, in order to progress projects such as the master plans through Project Board, Cabinet and Full Council, agency staff or consultants are utilised funded by PPAs. The Local Plan review will use a range of suppliers. This will include IT providers / software platforms, specialist consultants for topic-specific studies, legal advice and, at examination stage, fees for the Inspector.

8.3.6 Strategic Projects & Infrastructure: Blink was appointed through a framework under a concession contract to support the Council in its delivery of electric vehicle charging points utilising a government grant. Blink are responsible for the installation and maintenance of the charging points, which will include the Council's existing charge points within car parks which will be replaced as part of this project.

8.4 Challenges, Barriers and/or Risks

8.4.1 Changes in Legislation:

Planning is frequently seen as an area in need of change by Governments in order to facilitate increased housing delivery and economic recovery. The Government published a revised and updated version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024. The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies. It is a material consideration when deciding planning applications. It also guides how we produce policy documents such as the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents. The policies and requirements of the NPPF are identified, as applicable, in officer reports and recommendations to Planning Control Committee, Cabinet and Full Council. As a result of the new NPPF, officers are:

- Reflecting the new policies and requirements in relevant reports to Planning Control Committee and delegated decisions on planning applications
- Updating our land supply position (last published in May 2024) to reflect the new rules as well as more recent information on planning permissions and completions. We previously concluded the Council could demonstrate 3.9 years' supply based upon rules in the previous NPPF. We expect the new rules will see this figure fall slightly. It will also apply in more circumstances. Previous appeal decisions and case law have advised that decision-takers should have regard to the 'broad magnitude' of any shortfall against the five-year requirement
- Reviewing and updating the Council's Green Belt Review (GBR). The Council's last study dates from 2018 and informed the current Local Plan. Its findings were based upon Green Belt coverage as it was at the time. This was prior to the adoption of the current plan which both released land from and added land to the Green Belt. It also does not reflect the new language of the NPPF in terms of grey belt and the identification of areas making a 'less than strong' contribution to certain Green Belt purposes. In this context, officers consider that the 2018 GBR is not an appropriate basis for deciding whether land in the District might meet the new 'grey belt' definition
- Progressing the review and update of our Local Plan.

8.4.2 Staffing:

Recruitment and retention with the planning profession is a recognised nationwide issue. Within the Portfolio key roles have not been able to be filled, for example the vacancies for two experienced planning officers have been advertised multiple times for over a year with no success, these roles are key for the delivery of local plan review and the town centre strategies. Where necessary alternative measures have been taken to fill vacant roles:

- The use of agency staff and or consultants: predominantly used to progress projects such as the town centre strategies and master plans. These are expensive and where possible are paid for through PPA's, where not possible these costs have to be met through existing budgets
- The use of Public Practise a not-for-profit organisation that places private sector professionals in planning and transport roles within the public sector for between 12 and 24 months. Currently the Portfolio has two staff in place from Public Practise, there were three, but one post has transferred to a full-time permanent role.
- The use of graduates, the portfolio has a long tradition of utilising graduates in order to 'grow our own', currently there are three graduates in post recruited through a government scheme and one other post recruited to in the traditional way. Graduates require sufficient senior staff to ensure training can be undertaken and does result in delays while they grow.

8.5 Opportunities

8.5.1 Delivery of high-quality places

The use of masterplanning and design codes will lead to the delivery of high-quality housing sites and town centre regeneration schemes. The involvement of Members in the drawing up of a Design Code has helped officers identify key issues that the code should focus upon. Member site visits were held in Autumn 2024 to help identify 'the good, the bad and the ugly'. A visioning workshop is being held in March. More broadly, Member involvement in the masterplan and design-code processes, along with a more proactive officer approach to training and briefing, is positively influencing committee debates on relevant items

8.5.2 Delivery of more electric vehicle charging points for residents/visitors under the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) grant. HCC was awarded £6.7m of LEVI funding from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles, (OZEV) in March 2024. OZEV is part of the Department for Transport and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. The LEVI Fund is primarily targeted at addressing the need for EV charging in areas with lower levels of residential off-street parking. HCC are leading on the project and are working together with Districts and Boroughs (D&Bs) to install new charge points across Hertfordshire. The ten D&Bs have been split into three lots. North Herts is part of Lot A, along with St Albans and Welwyn Hatfield.









Provided that all districts and boroughs participate in the Hertfordshire programme, Lot A will receive £1,820,000 (30%) of the capital funding. To date, HCC has held regular (approximately fortnightly) meetings with NHDC and all other D&Bs to discuss and agree an acceptable governance arrangement for this project. Those discussions have been constructive, and there has been a high degree of collaboration between officers at HCC and NHDC in shaping the project. HCC will be looking to procure three different Charge Point Operators (CPOs) under a concession contract in Spring.
















NHDC will not be a party to the concession contract but will instead be required to sign a collaboration agreement with HCC to support the concession contract. The main areas that this will cover include site selection, making of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs), enforcing TROs and monitoring the contract.

- 8.5.3 Delivery of LCWIP working in partnership with HCC in identifying priority cycling and walking routes to be progressed with available funding primarily from government grants and Section106 contributions from developers across the various towns.
- 8.5.4 The Local Plan review provides the opportunity to review and update policies to better reflect current Council priorities including the declaration of Climate Change and Ecological Emergencies.

8.6 Performance

8.6.1 Below is a table detailing the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) recorded on Ideagen:

KPI Title	Last Update	Year-to-Date Value	Status	Direction of Travel (Compared with same time last year)
Number of planning applications taken to appeal due to 'non-determination' within the statutory time period, which were allowed	Q3 2024/25	0		 (0)
Number of allowed planning appeal decisions	Q3 2024/25	3		 (2)
Percentage of major planning applications determined within the relevant statutory or agreed time periods	Q3 2024/25	87.5%		 (81.25%)
Percentage of all planning applications determined within the relevant statutory or agreed time periods	Q3 2024/25	86.2%		 (85.22%)

Total number of car parking tickets purchased in Hitchin	January 2025	599,396		 (585,009)
Total number of car parking tickets purchased in Letchworth	January 2025	155,575		 (157,866)
Total number of car parking tickets purchased in Royston	January 2025	189,421		 (190,311)
Total number of car parking tickets purchased in other towns (Baldoack and Knebworth)	January 2025	18,480		 (17,947)
Number of Major planning applications where the fee has been refunded due to the application not being determined within 26 weeks	Q3 2024/25	0		N/A First year of data
Number of Non-Major planning applications where the fee has been refunded due to the application not being determined within 16 weeks	Q3 2024/25	0		N/A First year of data
Number of fee-earning planning applications received by Development Control	January 2025	1,233		 (1,065)
Number of non-fee-earning planning applications received by Development Control	January 2025	879		 (896)
Number of parking penalty charge notices issued	January 2025	13,474		N/A for KPI (12,732)

As the above KPIs are local indicators, benchmarking data is not available for the majority of them.

- 8.6.2 The Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) completed an audit of “Planning Applications”, which was reported in May 2024. The audit provided “reasonable” assurance that there are effective controls in operation for the elements covered by the review. Conclusions included that the Council’s planning application process is adequately designed, there is appropriate segregation of duties in place, the Council’s performance management system provides visibility of the number of decisions made, and that cases are reviewed and validated prior to decision notices being sent out. However, one medium priority recommendation was raised relating to the introduction of a central log for approval limits, which was subsequently implemented by the agreed target date.
- 8.6.3 During 2024/25, SIAS also worked with NHC officers to undertake an assurance mapping exercise for Council Delivery Plan projects. This is a structured way of identifying and presenting the sources of assurance over how related project risks are being managed. Initial indications are that good sources of assurance are in place, although we are still awaiting receipt of the final audit report
- 8.6.4 The service managers have responsibility for budgets and regularly meet with the Group Accountant to monitor and update, progress, any updates / variances are reported through to the Service Director.

8.6.5 A local planning authority can be 'designated' only if, "the Secretary of State considers that there are respects in which the authority are not adequately performing their function of determining applications". Performance has both a speed and quality measure. Where an authority is designated, applicants may apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State) for the category of applications (major, non-major or both) for which the authority has been designated, subject to exceptions.

- The speed measure used is the percentage of decisions on applications made:
 - (a) within the statutory determination period; or
 - (b) within such extended period as has been agreed in writing between the applicant and the local planning authority
- The quality measure is the percentage of the total number of decisions made by the authority on applications that are then subsequently overturned at appeal

For a District the designation thresholds are:

- 60% for speed of major development
- 70% for speed of non-major development
- 10% for quality of major development
- 10% for quality of non-major development

Referencing the latest 'live' tables on the gov.uk website, North Herts is at:

- 91.8% for majors (24 months to the end of September 2024)
- 94.1% for non-majors (24 months to the end of September 2024)
- 0.0% for majors (24 months to the end of September 2023)
- 0.2% for non-majors (24 months to the end of September 2023)

For comparison within Herts, looking at an abutting District and Borough:
East Herts:

- 69.5% for majors (24 months to the end of September 2024)
- 82.8% for non-majors (24 months to the end of September 2024)
- 2.8% for majors (24 months to the end of September 2023)
- 2.0% (24 months to the end of September 2023)

Stevenage

- 91.2% for majors (24 months to the end of September 2024)
- 94.6% for non-majors (24 months to the end of September 2024)
- 0.0% for majors (24 months to the end of September 2023)
- 0.6% (24 months to the end of September 2023)

8.7 Key Projects

8.7.1 Review of the Local Plan

All local authorities have a statutory duty to prepare a Local Plan for their area. This should be regularly reviewed and kept up to date. Each iteration of the Local Plan should look forward over an appropriate time horizon, normally 15 years from the date of adoption. A Local Plan sets policies for the development and use of land in the area. It forms part of the Council's Policy Framework. It is a key document when determining planning applications in the District.

8.7.1.1 The Council's current Local Plan was adopted in 2022. This was the first Local Plan update since 1996. It was the first update to proactively identify new sites for development in North Herts since 1993. The Local Plan covers the period from 2011 to 2031 and was allowed to be adopted on a proviso that work on a review should begin by the end of 2023.

What is the goal of the project?

8.7.1.2 The aim of the Local Plan review is to provide an up-to-date set of policies, targets and land allocations for the District. The review will take account of current legislation, national policy and local aspirations and priorities. The period the review will cover has not been formally determined but is expected to be approximately 2025 to 2045.

When is the project expected to complete?

8.7.1.3 It is currently anticipated that the project will complete at the end of 2027. This is subject to a number of caveats including resourcing and government legislative changes.

What has been achieved to date?

8.7.1.4 To date the following steps have been taken:

- 'In principle' approval by [Cabinet in January 2024](#) that a full review of the Local Plan should take place subject to the publication of Government guidance and regulations
- Restructuring of and investment in the Strategic Planning Team over several budget cycles to increase staff capacity
- Approval of revenue budget bids over several budget cycles to provide funding over the period to 2027/28 of approximately £700k to support the review
- Preparing the 'back office' required to support the review including ongoing procurement of new IT platforms, overhaul of the website and review of consultation databases to comply with data protection requirements
- Ongoing work on early-stage evidence studies including joint work with neighbouring authorities where appropriate
- Reporting to the internal Project Board on progress and key issues; and
- Approval of a [Local Development Scheme](#) (LDS) by Cabinet in January 2025. The LDS is a statutory document that sets out a timetable for producing the Local Plan.

What is the current status of the project?

8.7.1.5 The project is on-going with updates presented to the Strategic Planning Project Board and through the Strategic Planning report to Cabinet.

What are the next steps?

8.7.1.6 The next steps set out in the LDS (see below), subject to the key risks and issues identified below, are:

Plan-making stage	Description	Timetable
<i>Survey of area (S13 of the P&CP Act 2004)</i>	Matters which may be expected to affect the development of the area or the planning of its development	Keep under review
<i>Scoping and early participation</i>	Early engagement	2024 - 2025
<i>Gateway 1</i>	Independent, specialist support to ensure Plan sets off in the right direction, supporting early diagnosis of any potential issues including legal, procedural requirements and soundness	September 2025
<i>Public consultation (Regulation 18 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012)</i>	We notify certain specified bodies or people of the subject of the Local Plan which we propose to prepare and invite representations about what our Local Plan should contain	October - November 2025
<i>Evidence gathering</i>	This stage will include a Call for Sites	2024 - 2026
<i>Gateway 2</i>	Plan Inspector supports early resolution of potential soundness issues, ensuring legal and procedural compliance and monitoring and tracking progress	September 2026
<i>Public consultation (Regulation 19 and 20 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012)</i>	We make available the proposed submission documents and a statement of representation procedure. Anyone may make representations about our Local Plan that we intend to submit to the Secretary of State by a specified date	October - November 2026
<i>Gateway 3</i>	Planning Inspector checks the Plan is ready to proceed to Examination having ensured legal and procedural compliance and monitoring and tracking progress	February 2027

<i>Submission to the Secretary of State (Regulation 22 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012)</i>	We submit our Local Plan to the Secretary of State for examination along with certain prescribed documents/statements including copies of the representations made a Regulation 20	March 2027
<i>Independent Examination (Regulation 23 and 24 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012)</i>	Our Local plan is independently examined by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State	March – November 2027
<i>Publication of Inspectors Report (Regulation 25 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012)</i>	We publish the recommendations of the Inspector	November 2027
<i>Adoption (Regulation 26 of the T&CP (LP) (England) Regulations 2012)</i>	We adopt the Local Plan, make it available and send the Adoption Statement to certain individuals	December 2027

What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?

8.7.1.7 The Council Delivery Plan includes the following Risk Description:

- Government fails to provide regulations and guidance in a timely fashion
- Government introduces different or new or substantive reforms to the planning system and / or national policy
- Failure to retain/recruit sufficiently experienced officers to implement required programme of work
- Failure to secure funding to resource the process
- Failure to obtain political and / or Government approval at key stages or gateways
- Government intervention if inadequate progress is made upon Local Plan Review
- Inadequate guidance leads to scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to, or contribute towards, corporate objectives and priorities of climate change, environment, economy and place
- Poor scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to local character and context
- Adverse appeal findings on other/non-Local Plan sites if progress on the Local Plan Review is delayed or stalled.

8.7.1.8 The [January 2025 Cabinet report supporting the LDS](#) discussed these issues in detail. This report should be referred to for additional information if required. The timing and nature of any Government proposals and reforms remains a key uncertainty.

8.7.2 Town Centre Strategies

What is the goal of the project?

- 8.7.2.1 The intention is to prepare an overarching Town Centres Strategy covering all four town centres together with clear policy guidance for each town centre included within the same document. This would help speed up the process and provide the necessary policy guidance for each town centre while the Local Plan is under review, rather than complete individual strategies per town as set out in the adopted Local Plan – which could take a further 2 years.

Once adopted as Council Policy the Town Centres Strategy will guide developers, investors, organisations, and the general public, to help shape the future of each town centre; inform the early review of the Local Plan for plan making; and can be taken as updated evidence for decision taking when considering redevelopment opportunities within the town centres.

When is the project expected to complete?

- 8.7.2.2 An initial review has been presented to the Strategic Planning Project Board, the final strategy will be taken back to the Board prior to being presented to Cabinet in June 2025 where agreement is sought for public consultation over the summer. The draft will be reviewed following public consultation with the aim of adoption by Cabinet in December 2025/Jan 2026 (dependent on committee dates in the new civic calendar for 2025/26).

What has been achieved to date?

- 8.7.2.3 Consultants were appointed to undertake a full Retail and Town Centre study of the 4 towns which was completed in September 2024 and provides the evidence base for the town centres strategy. Part of this study were workshops with key stakeholders. Stakeholders included BID managers, town centre property owners, property management agencies, charities, colleges, societies, and trusts, as well as Members. The findings from the Retail Study together with its key recommendations for the draft Town Centres strategy were presented to the Strategic Planning Project Board in October 2024.

The Project Board identified a number of key areas where further work was required in terms of providing a clear policy direction for accommodating the retail and leisure floorspace growth across the town centres whilst recognising the changing patterns in consumer behaviour and visitor requirements to ensure the continued vitality and viability of the town centres. As well as being clear about what the Strategy can influence and the Council's role in partnership working and seeking external funding opportunities to assist in delivery.

With the assistance of a temporary planning officer working together with a Town Centres Project Officer some of the further work has been undertaken and an interim working draft has been prepared and submitted to the Strategic Planning & Projects Manager for review in mid-December 2024.

What is the current status of the project?

- 8.7.2.4 Following review of the interim working draft, it was felt that more work needed to be done and with the loss of the temporary planner (see 8.4.2 re recruitment issues), due to other project commitments by the Strategic Planning & Projects Manager, with the introduction of the Pay on Exit parking and EV projects, it has been agreed to

appoint/extend the contract with the same consultants who undertook the retail study to assist officers in completing the draft strategy. The scope of the work is under discussion and procurement requirements are being addressed.

What are the next steps?

8.7.2.5 Once the scope has been agreed, there will be ongoing engagement by the consultants with key officers and a draft strategy will be prepared. The draft Strategy will be presented to the Strategic Planning Project Board in May 2025 for their review and agreement to submit the draft to Cabinet for formal consultation over the summer. This will enable the Town Centres Strategy to be harmonised with other council strategies such as the emerging Economic Development Strategy and the emerging Sustainability Strategy.

What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?

8.7.2.6 Potential lack of resources to develop, approve and deliver the Town Centres Strategy. By not having a Strategy in place will result in a lack of approved strategic direction and guidance which could lead to speculative development that may not meet the aspirations of the Council for its town centres.

8.7.3 Electric Vehicle Charging

The installation of EVCP's in the Council Car Parks is Phase 1 of this project outlined in detail below and Phase 2 includes working in partnership with HCC to deliver on-street EVCPs under the LEVI grant as outlined in paragraphs 8.5.2 above.

EV Charging in Council Car Parks.

What is the goal of the project?

8.7.3.1 To meet the Council's Climate Change Strategy by expanding and replacing the current Electric Vehicle Charge Point (EVCP) provision within its car parks. To utilise grant funding from the OZEV in order to enter into a concession contract with an CPO for the provision of new EVCPs in its car parks to serve residential properties with limited off-street parking.

When is the project expected to complete?

8.7.3.2 By July 2025 to in accordance with the requirements of the OZEV grant. NHC has been given an extension of time for delivery of the project from the Department For Transport. All EVCPs are to be installed and fully operational.

What has been achieved to date?

8.7.3.3 To date the following has been achieved:

- Council appointed Blink UK Ltd in early 2023 under a Framework to enter into a concession contract, subject to the Council being successful in seeking grant funding
- The Council was successful in seeking OZEV grant funding in September 2023
- The concession contract was formally signed on 7 January 2025 following a number of legal requirements and obligations that needed to be negotiated and agreed between both parties under the concession contract to ensure the Council was satisfied given the life of the contract over 15 years. Initial work was being undertaken together with Blink during this intervening time

- Satisfying insurance requirements for the installation of EVCPs in the multistorey car parks (MSCPs) due to increase fire risk
- Seeking agreement from the landlord of Garden Square MSCP to replace EVCPs having satisfied necessary insurance requirements
- The Council has issued a Letter of Authorisation to Blink to place orders with the Distribution Network Operator (DNO).

What is the current status of the project?

8.7.3.4 The current status is as follows:

- License agreements are under preparation for each car park, the Council is waiting on the receipt of site plans from Blink in order to complete the agreements
- Meetings are underway between the Council's and Blink's Communications and PR Teams to agree communications and PR programme for implementation of the EVCPs in the Council car parks
- Blink have issued a draft project delivery plan which shows completion by mid-May 2025, but Blink have caveated this by stating that some of these items are their best estimates based on UK Power Networks current delivery timescales for the DNO connections

What are the next steps?

8.7.3.5 To review and agree the project delivery plan and works schedule to install EVCPs in the following car parks:

- Letchworth: Hillshott and Garden Square MSCP
- Hitchin: Woodside, Bancroft and Lairage MSCP
- Royston: The Warren, Civic Centre
- Baldock: The Twitchell

To issue and sign off the necessary license agreements per car park.

What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?

8.7.3.6 Inability to deliver the project in accordance with the OZEV grant funding requirements, as a result of delays in scheduling the required DNO.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The preparation of Local 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.
- 9.2 Under regulation 10A of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended), local planning authorities must review their Local Plans within five years of the adoption date. Cabinet has previously resolved 'in principle' to update the Local Plan (January 2024) and approved the statutory Local Development Scheme which establishes a timetable for this (January 2025). The review of the portfolio allows for progress and planned activity to be considered under the scrutiny functions of the Council.
- 9.3 Under the Council's Constitution (14.6.11(b)(iv)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. Financial implications are covered within the main body of the report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good risk management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. There are no direct risk implications arising from this report.
- 11.3. Risks to successfully delivering key projects are included in the Council Delivery Plan:
Local Plan Review – e.g., lack of (and changing) government guidance, insufficient financial/staff resources, lack of agreed vision, failure to obtain approval at key stages/gateways.
Pay on Exit Parking – e.g., failure to bring separate project elements together, negative public reaction to changes and disruption during works on site.
Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks – e.g., inability to deliver project in accordance with funding requirements, delays in scheduling required Distribution Network Operator upgrades.
Town Centre Strategies – e.g., lack of resource to develop, approve and deliver strategy, lack of approved strategic direction leads to speculative development.
- 11.4. Other service risks included on the Risk Register include:
Open Space in Major New Developments – e.g., inconsistencies in approach, implications of resident management companies becoming unsustainable, robustness of commuted management sum calculations, developers' unwilling to agree NHC adoption due to the costs involved.
EV charging Points – e.g., if not adequately controlled, increased fire risk to relevant premises and risk to future insurance provision.

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 no direct equality implications. Some of the identified projects may positively impact on those who share a protected characteristic and will be monitored as the projects progress.

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 Human Resource impacts are covered within the main body of this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A: Regulatory Service Plan 2024-2025

16.2 Appendix B: Structure Chart: Development Management

16.3 Appendix C: Structure Chart: Strategic Planning

16.4 Appendix D: Structure Chart: Strategic Planning & Projects

16.5 Appendix E: Update on the Council Delivery Plan 24-25 at Q3 for Planning and Transport

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Ian Fullstone Service Director Regulatory
ian.fullstone@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4480

17.2 Nigel Smith Strategic Planning Manager
Nigel.smith@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4847

17.3 Louise Symes Strategic Planning and Projects Manager
Louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4359

17.4 Shaun Greaves Development Management & Conservation Manager
Shaun.greaves@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4159

17.5 Jodie Penfold Group Accountant
Jodie.penfold@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4332

17.6 Dean Fury Corporate Support Accountant
Dean.fury@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4509

17.7 Tim Everitt Performance & Risk Officer
Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4646

17.8 Reuben Ayavoo Policy & Communities Manager
Reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk / ext 4221

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Council Plan

18.2 Council Plan – Delivery Plan

18.3 [Live tables on planning application statistics - GOV.UK](#)