



4th October 2019

Hertfordshire LEP
One Garden City
Broadway
Letchworth Garden City
SG6 3BF

By email

Our Ref: Herts LIS Response

Your Ref:

Contact Officer : Andrew Figgis

Direct Line : 01462 474477

E-mail : andrew.figgis@north-herts.gov.uk

Dear Sirs,

Hertfordshire Local Industrial Strategy: Draft for consultation: September 2019

Thank you for providing North Hertfordshire District Council the opportunity to comment on the Draft Hertfordshire Local Industrial Strategy. We note that you have requested comments via your on-line survey to specific questions. Given that we also have a number of general comments on the draft strategy, we also wish to submit our response as set out in this letter.

General comments

North Hertfordshire District Council welcomes the new Local Industrial strategy and is broadly in agreement with its themes and priorities. There are some areas, however, where we feel a different emphasis or clarification is required.

In general, the Strategy pre and post 2031 refers to incremental growth focused on existing settlements. To date, we have seen little activity from the LEP in North Hertfordshire and feel that considerable scope exists in our area to develop up to and beyond 2031, taking advantage of North Hertfordshire's strategic position in relation to London, Cambridge, the Oxford Cambridge Arc and the A1/A505 corridors, both incrementally and in development of new carefully selected areas.

In relation to skills, the strategy contains great aspirations for upskilling those at the higher end of the academic ladder, but little reference is made to those lower skilled and less able-to-be-skilled people who require still jobs. Although North Hertfordshire 'imports' lower skilled workers, many are resident in our community. Finding a solution to the second major challenge identified in the Strategy is key to reducing the inequalities in our communities. We are not convinced that the Strategy goes far enough in this respect.

Outlined below are our specific comments in relation to the consultation questions.

Question1 – Productivity & Inclusive Growth:

We agree that productivity (or more precisely the lack of commercial investment) in Hertfordshire is a serious challenge to economic growth and wellbeing. It felt that the sustainability of our towns in Hertfordshire as commercial, cultural and social centres are of equal importance for consideration.

We also agree that that disparity in the prosperity of different communities is a serious and worsening problem and that this also needs to be addressed.

North Hertfordshire District Council, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3JF

Question 2 – Challenges & Growth Scenarios:

Much of Hertfordshire is bounded by the London Green Belt. This limits the areas for commercial or residential expansion to the existing town areas or non-green belt areas largely in the north and north-east of the county.

To date residential requirements have been favoured over commercial use in towns, not least by the use of PDRs by the private sector. This undermines the economic fabric of the towns which in turn endangers their social fabric as falling footfall and out commuting render the town centres redundant in terms of retail commerce.

The most desirable scenario is undoubtedly the first. The challenges of scenario 1 are firstly to locate and develop sites in strategic areas of Hertfordshire which are going to meet the needs of larger companies and more importantly growing local companies, and secondly to retain those areas of commercial land within towns and to encourage through sympathetic planning, the development of sustainable employment areas. This will allow local services to grow locally, encourage footfall in the town centres allowing the town centre businesses to adapt to the needs of the 21st century. This will allow each town centre to retain and adapt an identity of its own in the post retail world.

The challenge of the second scenario is to provide the infrastructure to cope with the out commuting and inflow of services and is in effect the mirror image of the first. That said the development of strategic sites must be undertaken with an eye for sustainable transport of both people and goods and liaison with national bodies to ensure that the correct transport provisions are in place to accompany the developments.

The Strategy makes little reference to the location of some of the key knowledge based industries such as Johnson Matthey and Sartorius in North Hertfordshire and opportunities that northern Hertfordshire can play in terms of its location in relation to the Oxford- Cambridge Arc, and links with the Luton enterprise zone.

Question 3 – Strategic Themes:

We feel that the strategic themes are the right ones to consider, going forward, in particular Theme 5 relating to the development and redevelopment of commercial space and Theme 2, the revitalisation of our towns. Letchworth Garden City suffers the worst disparities in community wellbeing of any of the Hertfordshire towns. Reference should also be given to the potential opportunity of planning for further new settlements within Hertfordshire, as there is a limit to how much further the existing towns can continue to grow incrementally.

In terms of Theme 3 We feel that the development of sustainable clusters should be encourage with reference to the **rail** system (rather than just A1 corridor), to encourage sustainable commuting and transport.

We welcome the reference to the east- west growth corridors in Theme 4, and the opportunity to improve such connectivity. However we express concern about the lack of reference to a northern corridor along the A505 and the opportunity this link provides in terms of working with neighbouring authorities in linking with the London Luton Airport Enterprise Zone to west and Stanstead Airport to the east and northwards towards Bedford and Cambridge.

Question 4 – Ideas Foundation:

The key priority for Hertfordshire is to create the environment to encourage a critical mass of businesses involved in R & D to locate in the County. The key commodity of these companies is the expertise of their staff. The environment needs to be attractive to their employees not only

in terms of ease of access (perhaps from London, Cambridge or further afield), but also the working environment and environs with a suitably academic campus atmosphere to attract the top talent.

Whilst the A1 corridor may look to 'major' in aerospace and bioscience, the A505 corridor and railway line towards Cambridge is already emerging as the location for high technology engineering and bioscience, with Johnson Matthey, Sartorius and Mettler Toledo in Royston and the Melbourn Science Park home to TTP and Astra Zeneca etc. al. We feel that the strategy should show aspirations towards supporting the area from Hitchin to Royston as a key part of the local and regional economy.

Question 5 - People:

The linkage between Higher Education, universities, industry and schools is paramount in upskilling the population and almost as importantly, instilling the ambition in people to follow a career path to higher skilled, high productivity jobs. The key to inclusive growth, one of the main challenges of this paper, is access for all to the means of raising skills levels. This strategy should not only address the high end top research area, but even more importantly address the relative skills deficit of some of the lower earning parts of the community.

Therefore, for example the 'university outposts' themes could be extended to Anglia Ruskin University in the East to provide facilities in the south and east of the county as well as with the local colleges.

Outreach from beacons such as the Stevenage Biotech, the Rothamstead research establishment, Public Health England, Stansted and Luton Airports, MMC facilities in Hemel Hempstead and Gilston and the aerospace engineering industry in Stevenage should be made to schools to instil the ambition in young people to follow a high value career path.

Employment and Skills Programmes attached to major construction projects should be coordinated to provide a continuous learning experience for apprentices. Likewise, the promotion of apprenticeships addressed particularly at those who do not wish to go to university should be encouraged as a part of an overall programme to raise the skills levels of the less well-off and address the issue of inclusive growth which is one of the two main challenges of this strategy.

Question 6 – Infrastructure:

We recognise the value of the specific projects mentioned in the strategy and all have merit. However, there needs to be some recognition of how these will contribute to the long term goals of reduced emissions, increased long term growth and improvement in the quality of life. Reference should also be made to the strategic aims and objectives of the Hertfordshire LTP4.

Given the amount of house building proposed in Hertfordshire in the period to 2032 and beyond, the answer is not necessarily to build more roads, but to change behaviours and modes of transport. Indeed, the sustainability of some developments is predicated on the use of sustainable transport and investment should be focused towards making provision for such infrastructure to encourage modal shift.

The themes of digital connectivity and local power supply must be explored and the advancement of 5G should be extended as far as practically feasible to all domestic and commercial areas of Hertfordshire.

Effort should also be focused on raising Hertfordshire's profile with the National Grid and other key infrastructure providers to ensure that new developments include advanced local power generation and battery storage facilities. Efforts should also be made to provide funding to

'pump-prime' the National Grid's upgrading of local power substations to enable domestic vehicle charging facilities for new and existing premises to be viable.

Question 7- Business Environment:

As local authorities, the requirement most persistently cited as a problem by business is lack of suitable business premises for either for establishment or expansion. Hertfordshire including North Herts has suffered chronic underinvestment in its commercial stock. The advent of the new MEES regulations in 2024 will render many places unrentable, although owners are happy to landbank premises in the hope of eventual residential development. Much of the commercial space in Hertfordshire is also sited where it is for historic reasons and this is not necessarily ideal for modern uses, an example being Wilbury Way in Hitchin, where accessibility problems have become a major constraint on growth and investment.

Local authorities need to work with the LEP and other bodies to identify land suitable for redevelopment and development as modern commercial space, both for expanding and incoming companies. Without these high growth companies, the second and third tier suppliers who are often the commercial lifeblood of the local economy will suffer and could turn into decline. We therefore consider the first priority in this section to be the most important.

Question 8 - Place:

Much of the strategy is geared towards revitalisation of the New Towns of Hertfordshire and we strongly support the third priority that Letchworth needs to develop a new focus, in partnership with the Heritage Foundation.

However, there is also a key priority for Hertfordshire's older towns to retain their positions and functions as the economic, social and cultural hubs of our communities. Each has its own unique character and local residents and businesses should be enabled to develop funded strategies to re-orientate and re-energise their town post retail dominance and prepare for the future. We therefore consider that the sixth priority, re-energising the high streets with the help of town councils, BIDs and other local stakeholders, is the most important priority.

Question 9 – Next Steps:

Although we understand that no resource is as yet available to Hertfordshire, we would hope that in the fullness of time some central funding may become available. North Hertfordshire will consider the synergies with the LEP Industrial Strategy when preparing our own strategies and setting our budgets, will and work with public and private sector investors to maximise leveraged funding possibilities. We will also consider committing staff time to specific projects and working positively with the LEP and other partners and stakeholders to maximise benefits.

North Hertfordshire look forward to a constructive and proactive working relationship with the LEP as it progresses the Local Industrial Strategy.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Keith Hoskins

Executive Member for Enterprise and Co-operative Development
North Hertfordshire District Council