

TITLE OF REPORT: REGIONAL AND STRATEGIC PLANNING ISSUES

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL
PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR R. A. C. THAKE

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To inform Members of the current positions regarding:
- The East of England Plan;
 - West of the A1(M) at Stevenage and Stevenage / North Hertfordshire Action Plan;
 - Growth Area Liaison for the Luton conurbation;
 - Luton & Dunstable Northern Bypasses;
 - London Luton Airport and Stansted Airport.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report to Cabinet is included within the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Members will be aware of, and familiar with, many of the issues surrounding the significant strategic planning issues referred to in paragraph 1.1 above. This report is intended to provide Members with the current positions on these matters.

4. ISSUES

4.1 The East of England Plan and other Regional Issues

- 4.2 The **East of England Plan** was published on 12 May 2008. It is therefore now in force, and every local planning authority in the East of England has a duty to secure delivery of its proposals and compliance with its policies.

- 4.3 The published version is little different from the most recent draft version, the Government's "Proposed Changes" issued in December 2007. As far as this Council is concerned, the key elements of the regional spatial strategy are as follows:

- NHDC must secure an increase in housing stock of 6,200 dwellings between 2001 and 2021, of which some 1,900 were built by March 2006. Thus our Core Strategy must plan for the provision of a further 4,300 dwellings, through to 2021. (Policy H1) It should be noted that Great Ashby / Burleigh Park counts towards the Stevenage rather than the NHDC figures.
- The commentary to Policy H1 states that the NHDC "figures exclude provision for 9,600 as urban extensions to Stevenage included in the Stevenage figure and any urban extensions to Luton, reflecting the Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy."

- The strategy for Stevenage is set out in Policy SV1, and the main elements are:
 - i. Overall housing growth of 16,000 dwellings by 2021.
 - ii. Maximise opportunities for brownfield development within the town and address regeneration needs (Policy SS5).
 - iii. Sustainable urban extensions to west and north, to be brought forward together rather than sequentially.
 - iv. A minimum of 5,000 additional dwellings west of Stevenage
 - v. Green Belt review, allowing scope for continued growth of Stevenage until at least 2031 (Policy SS7).
 - vi. Provisions for strategic employment growth (Policy E3) to contribute to a net increase in jobs in Hertfordshire of 68,000 by 2021 (Policy E1).
- Policy H2 relates to Affordable Housing and every authority needs to set “appropriate” targets. The policy concludes that “at the regional level, delivery should be monitored against the target for some 35% of housing coming forward through planning permissions granted after publication of the RSS to be affordable.”
- Paragraph 10.8, expanding on Policy WAT2, states that “work on options for expanding sewage treatment capacity for the Rye Meads catchment area, which includes Stevenage, Harlow and Welwyn, is a priority. Restrictions in capacity at Rye Meads will need to be overcome without harm to the adjacent Lee Valley Special Protection Area or its qualifying features. A strategic review of options is required, looking beyond incremental expansion to new facilities or other possible works. Depending on necessary lead in times, this may bear on the rate of delivery.”
- Policy T15 identifies “the London to Huntingdonshire corridor, including the Stevenage area” and “the Luton Dunstable Houghton Regis area” as areas likely to come under increasing transport pressure as a result of the RSS and further work should be carried out “on developing the evidence to establish the interventions needed to address any problems.”
- Implementation will be achieved by, among other things, a region-wide implementation plan.” (Policy IMP1).

4.4 The above summary of key elements will be familiar to Members from earlier drafts of the Plan. The only two elements which have been changed in the final version are –

- The removal of a reference to “up to” 9,600 dwellings in the Council’s housing target in Policy H1 and the removal of a statement that the Stevenage BC figure of 6,400 “should be regarded as a definite minimum.”
- The amalgamation of two job growth targets (London Arc and North & East Herts) into a single target for Hertfordshire.

4.5 In commenting on the final version of the East of England Plan, it is useful to split comments between the overarching strategic issues which apply across the region and those in more detail, relating specifically to North Hertfordshire and Stevenage.

4.6 Strategically, the Plan is disappointing in that there is insufficient linkage between the three main elements – housing, jobs and infrastructure. It is predominantly a housing-

led strategy, rather than a comprehensive planning spatial strategy. It can be argued that the evidence base is far from adequate to justify the various strategic housing allocations. For example, the implications of major new development within the Rye Meads Sewage Treatment Works catchment area are still unknown (paragraph 10.8), as are the implications for the A1(M) and east coast main line (Policy T15).

- 4.7 Links between housing growth and job growth are now extremely tenuous. The setting of an indicative target for jobs growth in Hertfordshire, to be used for monitoring purposes and guidance, means that housing growth could proceed full steam ahead, with or without commensurate jobs growth. The consequences are clear – more commuting and congestion, particularly if the provision of needed infrastructure cannot keep up with the expanding growth centres.
- 4.8 The arguments relating to the inappropriateness of reviewing Green Belt boundaries to avoid the need for further review before at least 2031 are well known. Suffice to say that they have not been successful. Also, the arguments relating to targets being minimums (“floors” rather than “ceilings”) have been equally unsuccessful.
- 4.9 At the more local level, it is a concern that the East of England Plan seeks to set regional policy in matters which are entirely of only local interest. For example, the requirement that there must be a minimum of 5,000 additional dwellings to the west of Stevenage is surely a matter to be dealt with by the local planning authorities in formulating their local development documents for the area. The same applies to the requirement to have 9,600 of the 16,000 houses for Stevenage within North Hertfordshire – the split should clearly emerge through evolution of SNAP and the Stevenage Core Strategy. It is interesting to note that, for other growth points, the policies are not set out in such detail as the policy for Stevenage.
- 4.10 The issue now is whether the East of England Plan can still be challenged. If such a challenge is to be made, it must be lodged within 6 weeks of publication – that is, by 23 June 2008. Legal advice is being sought and this aspect of the report will be updated orally at the meeting.
- 4.11 **West of A1M at Stevenage – Planning Applications (3,600 dwellings and Associated Development)**
- 4.12 No decision has been made as yet by the Secretary of State on the two planning applications. A preliminary to any decision must be the completion of a legal agreement discharging the unilateral and associated documentation submitted by the Consortium in 2004/5. NHDC would need to be a party to that agreement. However, at the time of writing this report, no such agreement has been submitted to the Council for signature.
- 4.13 **Stevenage / North Herts Action Plan (SNAP)**
- 4.14 The Issues and Options public consultation concluded on 18 Jan 2008. The next step is to list and assess the various responses and begin the process of translating the public views into draft preferred options. Not much progress has been made due to resourcing difficulties.

- 4.15 However, another factor has emerged which has implications for the timetables of both the Core Strategy and SNAP. That factor is the need to carry out a Water Cycle Study (WCS) of the Rye Meads sewage treatment works catchment area. Both SBC and NHDC have been informed by the Environment Agency that to submit Core Strategies without awaiting the results of a WCS could result in the Core Strategies being found to be unsound.
- 4.16 We currently plan to submit the Core Strategy in September this year and to issue Preferred Options for SNAP for public consultation in October / November. A WCS has been commissioned and the final report is due at the end of October. In order to take its conclusions into account, it may be necessary to delay the submission of the Core Strategy until the early part of next year (2009). It seems sensible that public consultation on the preferred options of SNAP should follow rather than precede submission of the Core Strategy, and hence could take place around March / April 2009.
- 4.17 These changes mean that we need to consider amending our Local Development Scheme. This can only be done with the agreement of the Government Office. A meeting with representatives of GO-East has been set up for early July 2008. It is anticipated that the Head of Planning Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder, will be agreeing a new LDS timetable to reflect the enforced changes mentioned above.
- 4.18 **Growth Area Liaison for Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis**
- 4.19 At its meeting on 30 June 2008, the Luton and South Beds Joint Committee will consider draft preferred options for its emerging Core Strategy with a view to going out to public consultation in September / October this year. From an NHDC perspective, the most important issue is whether the preferred options will include a development allocation east of Luton within North Hertfordshire or not. At time of writing, no draft strategy has been seen.
- 4.20 The signs are not good! Luton and South Beds held what were called Community Forum Events on 22 and 23 May, at which one of the presentations was an assessment of all 13 sites identified in the Issues and Options document, each being classed as having either "limited," "moderate" or "strong" potential for accommodating development. The East of Luton site within North Hertfordshire was assessed as having "strong" potential – clearly a strong indication that the site will be included as a development allocation in the preferred options document. I will report orally on this aspect at the meeting.
- 4.21 In the meantime, Bloor Homes still intend to submit a planning application relating to development of a site in North Hertfordshire east of Luton. This will propose some 3,000 – 4,000 new homes and associated development in the vicinity of Mangrove Green and Cockernhoe. It will **not** include a new bypass linking the airport to the A505. Public exhibitions were held in mid-January and master planning / design workshops in April. The planning application is expected to be submitted at the end of the year.

4.22 **Luton & Dunstable Northern Bypasses**

4.23 There is nothing new to report on the bypasses, but we have recently been informed that the Public Inquiry into the proposed widening of junctions 10 to 13 of the M1 has been postponed. This is to allow further traffic modelling work to be undertaken and to consider further options, including hard shoulder running. No revised date for the Public Inquiry has been announced.

4.24 **London Luton Airport / Stansted Airport**

4.25 The NATS consultation on proposed airspace changes in the Terminal Control North area (which includes North Hertfordshire and much of London and the South-East) ended on 19 June 2008. NATS were seeking feedback on their proposals prior to submission to the Civil Aviation Authority for decision.

4.26 The proposed changes could have significant effects for some North Hertfordshire residents and a response, agreed by the portfolio holder, has been sent. The three main objections raised were:

- The new pattern will lead to more over-flying of tranquil rural areas of North Hertfordshire.
- The new pattern will result in the concentration of flights along narrow swathes, many of which will be over rural areas not previously over-flown.
- No account has been taken of the new growth areas around Stevenage in the new pattern which are likely to be over-flown in these proposals.

Hertfordshire County Council have sent a response on similar lines, and while there is general agreement, there are some detailed differences in the two councils' views.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no new legal implications raised in this report which have not previously been reported or anticipated.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The matters in this report do not raise any new financial or risk issues.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no new HR or equalities implications arising from the contents of this report.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

8.1 Councillor Thake has been kept fully informed on all the matters set out above.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That the contents of this report be noted.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To ensure that Cabinet is aware of current developments.

11. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

11.1 There have been no alternative options considered.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None

13. CONTACT OFFICERS

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14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 None other than published documents.