

East Herts District Council-Harlow Council Meeting Notes

Date/time: Monday 23rd September 2013, 3.30pm

Venue: Harlow Civic Centre

Attendees:

East Herts Council

Cllr Mike Carver (MC), Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport

Bryan Thomsett (BT), Planning Policy Manager

Martin Paine (MP), Senior Planning Officer

Harlow Council

Cllr Phil Waite (PW), Portfolio Holder Environment

Cllr Tony Durcan (TD), Portfolio Holder Resources & Enterprise

Graeme Bloomer (GB), Head of Regeneration

Dianne Cooper (DC), Planning & Building Control Manager

Paul MacBride (PMB), Forward Planning Manager

Meeting Notes

1. PMB explained that Harlow Council is proposing to consult on a housing target in spring 2014 with a pre-submission consultation on a draft plan late in 2014. Harlow Council's Sub-National Population Projections indicate a need for around 8,000 dwellings for the district alone, the majority of which could potentially be accommodated within Harlow's administrative area. However, in order to meet affordable housing and regeneration needs, higher figures would need to be examined in accordance with guidance set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Consequently PW explained that Harlow Council needed to consider if some of its unmet housing needs may need to be accommodated in other districts. This would have regard to whether there were potential regeneration benefits to the town arising from large-scale development north of Harlow.
2. BT explained that East Herts Council is proposing to consult on a draft District Plan (Preferred Options) for 12 weeks starting in early 2014, dependent upon agreement by Full Council on 11th December 2013. East Herts Council has noted that the projections suggest a housing requirement towards the upper end of the region 10,000 to 17,000 dwellings. The April 2013 Office for National Statistics release suggests an East Herts figure of 750 dwellings per year, or 15,000 dwellings over 20 years, although these figures had not yet been agreed by the Council. BT explained that East Herts Council had agreed to produce a single District Plan, including allocations, policies, and strategy.
3. MC stated that an informal session with East Herts Members only on 24th October would be the first time that the draft strategy would be presented for internal discussion and initial feedback from Members.

This would provide a strong steer as to the direction in which East Herts Council would be heading with its draft Plan and development strategy.

4. MC stated that East Herts Council is very aware of the need to get a plan in place. There was considerable pressure from planning applications and appeals on undesignated sites, for example at Buntingford. However, the Council was not prepared to rush through a plan without a robust evidence base, which could be at risk of being found unsound at examination and risk wasting substantial amounts of money to no purpose.
5. MP circulated the East Herts 'stepped approach' (Version 5 October 2013) chart showing key dates and process components. The approach to objective assessment of 69 initial 'areas of search' was explained. In summer 2012 East Herts Council agreed to shortlist around a dozen locations (plus villages) for further testing and assessment. These amounted to options for around 30,000 dwellings. Options shortlisted included 10,000 dwellings north of Harlow as an urban extension to the town, and an alternative test concept of 5,000 dwellings as a stand-alone new settlement in the same broad location.
6. MC stated that through its Plan-making process to date East Herts Council had made considerable efforts to understand not only issues within East Herts district but also wider strategic issues, underpinned by a robust evidence base. BT added that it was understood from East Herts Council's own strategic employment study that the main economic function of the district was to provide housing to workers in large employment centres outside the administrative boundaries of the district. MP added that Chapter 4 of the Supporting Document to the District Plan, which addresses cross-boundary strategic issues as well as site-level issues, had been issued to Officers at all adjoining authorities in September 2012 for informal comment.
7. MP asked whether Harlow Council was expecting to receive substantial investment from developers north of Harlow directly into Harlow regeneration and infrastructure projects within the town. It was uncertain whether there would be a large amount of money left over once all the infrastructure necessary to support the development had been provided.
8. TD explained that the regeneration benefits went beyond developer contributions. Increased critical mass could benefit the town centre in terms of increased spend and also provide benefits in terms of attracting and retaining businesses. PMB stated that a study on growth and regeneration would be available shortly following consideration by Harlow Council Members. DC noted that Harlow Council has a formal resolution in support of growth to the north of the town up to 10,000 dwellings in support of these wider objectives, subject to the necessary supporting infrastructure being in place.

9. GB pointed out that the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Consortium had identified Harlow North as a potential growth area. MC stated that the relationship between the responsibilities of external bodies and the local planning authorities was getting muddled. There was understandable frustration and confusion at local level about the appropriate level at which strategic planning was being undertaken. There was also concern that the development industry was beginning to take advantage of this confusion.
10. TD stated that there were a number of important infrastructure issues which should be assessed as part of the plan-making process. One matter related to provision for hospital capacity, and whether development north of Harlow could assist in this respect. This was just one example of why it is important to have clarity from East Herts Council in respect of whether or not it was proposing to include Harlow North in its District Plan.
11. MP drew attention to the feedback to the Issues and Options consultations carried out by both Councils in 2010/2011. Amongst over 7,000 comments to the East Herts consultation was a considerable amount of opposition to Harlow North, especially through the STOP Harlow North campaign. It was clear from Harlow Council's analysis of feedback to its own consultation responses from Harlow residents were generally, but not wholly, supportive of development north of Harlow. GB stated that there was inevitably opposition to Greenfield development options, but this needed to be weighed against the need for regeneration, housing and development, and national policy requirements.
12. TD asked whether East Herts was aware of non-political constraints or concerns about large scale development north of Harlow. MP responded that the main outstanding planning concerns related to the transport network.
13. MP stated that the orientation and layout of Harlow, including the width of the Stort floodplain and the developers' proposal for a doughnut-shaped design around Gilston Park posed challenges for coherent urban design as part of an extension to Harlow. The location of the M11 distant from the area north of Harlow and existing employment areas posed challenges for transport planning which were not simple to resolve. By contrast development nearer to the M11 was more attractive to business and less complicated in terms of transport planning.
14. GB stated that urban design challenges could be overcome through new focal points at the Stort crossings, and the Stort could be integrated as a continuation of the existing Harlow Green Wedge pattern of development. GB stated that junction 7a was justified in its own right in order to support growth to the east of Harlow, including the

Enterprise Zone, irrespective of development to the north. Epping Forest District also supported Junction 7a in order to alleviate queuing from Epping to junction 7 shared with Harlow. BT acknowledged that in planning terms there appeared to be a good case for a new junction 7a. PMB stated that another consideration related to potential increase in rail capacity in the area.

15. PW stated that Harlow Council supported a new A414 Eastwick-M11 Junction 7a northern bypass proposal in order to alleviate pressure on the town. However, it was unclear how such a road could be funded. MC raised concerns that if the area north of Harlow were to be identified for growth there could be pressure from developers to increase the amount of development above 10,000 dwellings in order to help finance a northern link road. GB commented that Harlow Council had early discussions with Infrastructure UK, although these had not progressed far. There was some discussion of the role of LEPs in financing infrastructure provision, although it is uncertain whether LEPs have sufficient finance to bridge the funding gap.
16. MP stated that based on Herts County Council's interim interpretation and advice in respect of the emerging modelling results, a northern link road between the A414 Eastwick roundabout and a new junction 7a on the M11 would not in itself adequately mitigate network pressures. MP acknowledged that further modelling results were due shortly and these would be studied with interest to see whether there were other mitigation measures which could potentially work.
17. BT explained that given the complexities of site delivery, East Herts Council had requested assistance from ATLAS. ATLAS had produced a Delivery Advice Note addressing the subject of uncertainty in infrastructure delivery. The Note was available on the Council's website in relation to 3rd October Panel meeting. MP explained that East Herts Council was considering a range of policy tools and approaches to addressing uncertainty and housing need. ATLAS was also engaged to elicit further information from developers at strategic site options, and this material was all being posted on the Council's website.
18. TD asked whether East Herts Council could meet its own housing needs without Harlow North. BT replied that the Council was still considering this point.
19. TD suggested that it would be more sustainable for East Herts to pursue a concentration strategy focused on large development sites with built-in infrastructure provision. BT replied that it was necessary to look at the development needs of settlements across the district and therefore a simple concentration strategy was not realistic, although Places for People had previously leafleted residents throughout East Herts, extolling the virtues of such a concentration strategy, in terms of reducing impact on East Herts' historic towns.

20. MC stated that East Herts development needs and constraints should be viewed in relation to the broader picture for the District. He stated that East Herts Council is taking an evidence-based approach to assessment of development options. If evidence comes to light that demonstrates fundamental obstacles to deliverability, further options including new sites elsewhere in East Herts may have to return for consideration. MP stated that East Herts Council was seeking to undertake a Delivery Study in 2014, prior to examination, which would shed more light on delivery matters. All relevant parties would be invited to contribute to the study.
21. It agreed that it was not appropriate to discuss a Memorandum of Understanding between the two Councils at this stage, until it was clear what East Herts Council's position was following Full Council on 11th December 2013. It was also agreed that a follow-up meeting would be held early in 2014 to review the outcome of the East Herts policy process, and progress by both authorities.
22. It was agreed that a joint meeting note would be prepared which was agreed by all parties. This note would be reported back to East Herts Council's District Planning Executive Panel in accordance with the protocol for Duty to Co-Operate Meetings with adjoining Local Planning Authorities.

The meeting was closed at 5.30pm

These notes have been agreed by Harlow Council and East Herts Council as a true reflection of the meeting.