

Duty to Co-operate Meeting with Stevenage Borough Council

**Thursday 30 June 2013
At Stevenage Borough Council**

Attendees

Cllr John Gardener (SBC)
Peter Bandy (SBC)
Richard Javes (SBC)

Cllr Mike Carver (EHC)
Bryan Thomsett (EHC)
Jenny Pierce (EHC)

East Herts Council

East Herts Council (EHC) described where they are in terms of preparing their development strategy, and highlighted several constraints in terms of obtaining evidence on key infrastructure required to prepare a deliverable and appropriate strategy.

Education provision and highway constraints continue to be the main cause for delay in deciding the strategy as there is neither the evidence available to discount options nor to support the deliverability of them. EHC are pushing for a more rapid response at the highest levels from both Essex and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) as the delay in receiving such evidence is preventing EHC from preparing it's strategy and defending it's position in terms of planning applications.

While EHC are waiting for this evidence, the Policy Team are taking the opportunity to update other evidence and combine the previously intended suite of documents into one single plan called the District Plan. As part of this process, EHC are preparing draft policies in collaboration with a group of Members put together with the specific purpose of scrutinising and shaping each policy. This approach fosters ownership of the Plan and has created a better working relationship between these Members and the Policy Team.

EHC hope to be in a position to take the draft District Plan out to consultation for a period of twelve weeks in the autumn of 2013. The Submission stage will follow depending upon the volume of responses, in mid 2014 with examination by end of 2014/early 2015, with adoption in late 2015.

EHC wish to raise concerns with DCLG over the constraints relating to the deliverability of a strategy where utilities and statutory providers are not in a position to plan for longer term eventualities. EHC are exploring the option of securing a deliverable plan for a short-medium time-frame with an early review after five years.

Stevenage

Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) explained that they received approval from their Members on Tuesday to proceed with their planned consultation, but the reports were yet to be presented to their Scrutiny Panel (due Monday 3rd June). SBC have notified neighbouring Parish Councils in advance of the consultation period to enable them to plan meetings to discuss the proposals. The consultation is programmed to run for six weeks commencing June 11th, ending 22nd July.

In terms of education capacity, SBC is relatively well provided for at both primary and secondary level. Barnwell Secondary School is split over three campuses, one of which (Collenswood) was originally thought to be surplus to requirements in the near future. Now HCC wish to retain the site after it closes in 2014 for future educational purposes in response to the level of growth proposed in the draft Plan. A site to the north of Great Ashby in North Herts District has planning permission for a new secondary school but HCC will let the permission lapse. The greatest secondary education need stems from the Great Ashby area as there is no secondary school in this area.

The two secondary schools located in the centre of the old town of Stevenage are located next to each other and are both very much in need of investment. One school (Thomas Alleyns) may seek to become an academy. Some primary schools will need to expand and will therefore need to use some of the local parks under licence as their playing fields. This position is not supported by SBC as their current playing pitches and local parks are very well used, there are issues over security, supervision and fencing required to protect the children as well as access and suitability. In addition, to make large areas of local parks single use for the school access for large parts of the day would prevent the use of the park for general public use. There are also issues of maintenance and the suitability of the space for playing pitch use. One other option being considered is the amount of land HCC require for playing fields. They could expand schools where they have potential to use larger playing fields and change the catchment areas of the remaining schools. SBC are hopeful that they will still be able to resolve education issues.

The overarching strategy for development is one of self-containment. Having been found unsound on their previous draft strategy as a result of North Herts District Council (NHDC) withdrawing their support for development to the north and north-west of the town as advocated in the Stevenage North Area Action Plan (SNAP) plans, the Council is reluctant to proceed with a plan that relies on a neighbouring authority.

In terms of highway issues, SBC are receiving conflicting advice with regards to the capacity of the A1(M) junctions. The Highways Agency had placed a limit of 1,000 new homes on the plan but the Highways Agency have now advised that they do not intend to continue with this. Improvements to the A1(M) within current motorway limits between junctions 6 and 7 would allow for the development strategy proposed for the first two-thirds of the plan period. In order to provide for the latter part of the development strategy, the A1(M) would need to be improved between junctions 7 and 8. Regardless of this, with the cumulative impacts of all development along this A1(M) corridor will require all three junctions to undergo major reconstruction by the end of the plan period.

There are concerns over the funding for such schemes. Even if SBC imposed a CIL charge and directed all of this spending towards these motorway improvements, there would not be enough funding to undertake the works. EHC suggested that this should be considered as a priority for the Highways Agency and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) as the issue affects the wider area

more generally and is vital to support both economic and residential growth in the corridor as a whole. SBC indicated that they had heard that their particular section of the A1(M) was not a priority for HCC, who appeared to prefer improvements further south between junctions 3 and 4 around Hatfield. The LEP Draft Strategy was due to be published within two weeks which may help authorities know whether they are to receive LEP funding for any major infrastructure proposals.

Both authorities agreed that they will conduct further meeting of this nature should the need arise in the future. It was appreciated by all parties that there was open discussion between neighbouring authorities and an acknowledgement of the issues facing each district/borough.