

## **East Herts District Council – Stevenage Borough Council Meeting Notes**

**Date/time: Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2014, 3pm**

**Venue: Stevenage Borough Council Offices, Daneshill House, Stevenage**

### **Attendees:**

#### **East Herts District Council**

Cllr Mike Carver (MC) Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport  
Bryan Thomsett (BT) Planning Policy Manager  
Kay Mead (KM) Senior Planning Officer, Planning Policy

#### **Stevenage Borough Council**

Cllr. John Gardner (JG) Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration  
Peter Bandy (PB) Director of Planning and Regeneration  
Paul Pinkney (PP) Head of Planning  
Richard Javes (RJ) Planning Policy Manager

### **Meeting Notes:**

1. MC explained that, in accordance with EHC's agreed governance arrangements, such meetings would have agreed meeting notes which will be reported to District Planning Executive Panel (then Executive and Full Council) and become a public document.

#### **Development**

2. MC outlined that the Draft District Plan would be subject to a 12 week public consultation commencing 28<sup>th</sup> February. The document proposes development of around 15,000 dwellings for the period to 2031. The draft Plan includes allocations and three Broad Locations for Development (BL's), which involved two areas (East of Welwyn Garden City and Gilston Area) with Duty to Co-operate implications, and another at North and East of Ware.
3. To recap on the last Duty to Co-operate meeting between the two authorities, MC understood that Stevenage intended to meet its own needs for the period to 2031.
4. It was agreed that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) should be produced between the two authorities in due course. This would not necessarily be an agreement of all matters but to state an understanding of the position of both Councils.
5. For Neighbourhood Planning (NP) there will be an open approach for the villages identified in the draft Plan to decide where development should take place within village boundaries. However, if this approach fails to deliver then the Council will allocate specific sites to meet need. The process has been working well in the district to date with a number of

areas showing an interest in developing NPs. The Planning Policy Team holds regular meetings with Town and Parish Councils following each District Planning Executive Panel meeting to brief them on agenda items and progress on the District Plan.

6. The East Herts Plan is a full District Plan which includes allocations and Development Management policies. These have been completely overhauled from the 2007 Adopted Local Plan and have involved Member Workshops as well as input not only from the Planning Policy Team, but also from the Development Management Team.
7. RJ queried whether the development to the North of Harlow would be proposed to meet Harlow's needs. For East of Welwyn Garden City also, whether these BLs would count only towards East Herts Council's housing needs.
8. MC commented that Harlow is primarily interested in the economic benefits that the provision of housing in this location would bring to Harlow rather than housing for housing's sake. It is very much a regeneration issue for the town, relating to Enterprise Zone aspirations, but there are acknowledged infrastructure problems currently.
9. In respect of East of Welwyn Garden City, BT stated that at the moment this is identified as meeting the needs of East Herts. East Herts has a need of around 15,000 dwellings overall, but if all allocated and broad location sites were to fully deliver then there is potential capacity for around 25,000. However, only around 10,000 can be achieved from the proposed allocations, villages, etc, so that around 5,000 dwellings would need to be realised from the BLs. These three locations could all be viable options, and could also offer scope for longer-term planning. However, all have their potential constraints which need addressing and which could result in any delivery being towards the latter part of the Plan.
10. At this stage, the quantum of need from neighbouring authorities is not known and it is not possible to wait while all neighbours prepare their plans. Harlow has produced a paper recently indicating a requirement of around 7,000 dwellings and is looking at aspirational growth of between 12,000 and 15,000 houses with a large emphasis on affordable housing. To date, East Herts has not had any quantified requests from any of its neighbours. The BLs and allocations would accommodate East Herts' needs and more going forward. However, all the BLs are predominantly Green Belt. More work is required to ascertain the full potential numbers. Of the three BLs, East of Welwyn Garden City has the least restrictions, once minerals have been removed. As part of its last consultation, Welwyn Hatfield floated the idea of 400 dwellings from its identified need being provided within East Herts due to identified capacity issues. This was on the basis of providing 400 dwellings per annum (dpa). However more recent Government and CLG projections

have revised this to 800 dpa, which is double what was previously consulted on.

11. Harlow is moving towards a discussion document in the spring regarding its housing figure or range. This will become clearer in due course.
12. JG sought to clarify that the East Herts position in terms of meeting its own need was the placing of developments taking a strategic point of view that these locations could meet the demand and could have expansion potential should a Duty to Co-operate need arise.
13. MC confirmed that this was the case.
14. RJ stated that in respect of Stevenage's hybrid key options consultation, there had not been a lot of response, but the issues raised have caused them to pause. Particular issues concern Stevenage's relationship with North Herts and also North Herts' relationship with Luton and Central Beds.
15. Stevenage is in the situation that North Herts could be contemplating a large amount of housing on the edge of Stevenage. However, if Stevenage publishes its plan in advance of North Herts then they could be found unsound.
16. JG said there were three options under consideration for housing figures but the Inspectorate wanted more evidence of where these numbers had come from in relation to the Housing Market Area (HMA).
17. RJ said that it would not be enough to simply cater for an authority's own needs and that the Inspectorate considers that the HMA as a whole should be catered for. ONS unofficial figures are likely to increase to between 7,000 and 8,000 dwellings. If this is the case then Stevenage will need to look to its neighbours as it will not be able to meet its needs within its boundaries. It may be possible to meet around 5,300 dwellings within Stevenage's boundaries; however, while some landowners are keen to press ahead, some may also withdraw from the process.
18. There is the potential that Stevenage may need to look to North Herts, East Herts or Central Beds to help meet its need. However, Central Beds may be considering locating housing requirement in the A1(M) corridor rather than near Luton. If their capacity proved to be constrained then this may intensify pressure on North Herts and East Herts.
19. Stevenage may therefore be looking to East Herts to meet some of its needs to 2031 and, even if not needed for this timescale, would be looking to East Herts to safeguard land at the East of Stevenage for long-term growth to meet Stevenage's needs.

20. JG raised the issue of affordable housing provision in areas provided outside the borough boundaries and where nomination rights of need generated in Stevenage would reside.
21. MC commented that New Homes Bonus was another similar issue amongst others that need clarification. For the BLs, these will take a long time to be commenced because of infrastructure requirements and a lack of funding streams.
22. BT stated that about 25 years ago new settlements were being proposed around Cambridge, but so far only one had been delivered.
23. RJ said that Stevenage has been talking to the LEP about bringing forward an underpass and other infrastructure to bring forward development West of Stevenage. There was the potential that North Herts could bring forward 5,000 in that location.
24. BT acknowledged the employment issue and stated that, if the Gilston Area were to come forward, it would link with Harlow in terms of rebalancing housing tenure and skills to regenerate Harlow. The critical housing mass would be likely to ensure the use of Harlow's services.
25. MC commented that there was also the potential that this could result in another commuter town that does nothing for Harlow, but would bring issues in relation to London instead. At the EiP there would be a need for a MOU to set the context for longer term growth.
26. Even the Ware BL brings its own difficulties in terms of infrastructure and the need for roads and sewerage provision.
27. KM noted that the effect of this quantum of development on the existing High Street and the town's services also required further in-depth investigation.
28. BT highlighted the education issue, and potential lack of sufficient places, both for this location and elsewhere in the district.
29. MC stated that highways and education were potential major blocks across the whole district and that HCC could become protagonists at the EiP. These two key areas explain the six month delay in bringing forward the draft Plan and the BLs have been identified as we still don't have all the answers in these respects.
30. RJ suggested that East of Stevenage could be an easy option to bring forward early in the plan period because of easy access to Gresley Way.
31. BT stated that 5,000 dwellings featured in the Call for Sites for that location, part of which could link in to other developments in North Herts in that area. However, due to several issues, this area does not feature

in the draft Plan. For the first five to 10 years the allocations would be in place to meet need, but some of these also have issues to be resolved.

32. MC noted that this was especially true for education.
33. RJ commented that Collinswood School is due to be mothballed until it is needed again in the future as there is current lack of demand.
34. RJ then stated that Aston End is not as visible as other parts of the Beane Valley and could meet a lot of objectives. He asked whether East Herts would like to revisit its decision on provision to the East of Stevenage.
35. BT acknowledged RJ's comments but stated that this location had not been brought forward as a strategic location in the draft District Plan for a number of reasons.
36. JG commented that, if it is going to take years to bring forward the BLs, it may be more sensible to bring forward land that is available in other locations such as East of Stevenage, which would save dwarfing market towns such as Ware and destroying their character.
37. BT noted that this location has been evaluated and while, in the long term it may be considered in terms of strategic locations for the next review of the District Plan, it did not feature in the current proposals.
38. JG suggested that a start could be made towards delivery.
39. BT stated that currently it was envisaged that the Gilston area would fulfil the district's longer term need. However, if the BLs were not able to deliver and alternative locations for development were sought then the East of Stevenage area would be likely to be one of those locations considered further. However, while a new settlement could potentially be sought, it would not on its own be likely to be deliverable in the Plan period.
40. MC commented that at this stage the draft District Plan is the preferred strategy, but may be subject to iteration going forward, mainly depending on outcomes of further work on the BLs.
41. PB questioned whether there was pressure from any other neighbour going forward.
42. BT commented that no neighbouring authority had stated an official position in this respect at this time.
43. MC discussed Broxbourne's ambitions to grow its economy and that there were no housing implications for East Herts at this time and that the district serves the borough in terms of the labour market. In respect

of the East Herts economy, the Agri sector was seen as a particular success.

44. JG welcomed the fact that East Herts had produced a draft District Plan document, but queried what the position would be if numbers were to change.
45. MC stated that if this happened and became out of line with what had been calculated so far then a re-evaluation would be needed prior to submission and a MOU to be produced.

### **Transport**

46. RJ referred to the A1(M) consortium.
47. JG stated that both Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield were pleased that this had commenced and were encouraged by the Highways Agency's new funding regime. However, with funding being spread widely, it was important to devote resources to ensure that pressure is exerted on the Highways Agency to make certain that Hertfordshire gets sufficient funding.
48. RJ noted that the A1(M) Route Based Strategy is currently subject to consultation. The evidence-based Part 1 points to the need for work on the Stevenage related section of the A1(M). It is hoped that increased capital will be identified for improvements between junctions 6 and 8.
49. RJ considered that it might be helpful for East Herts to respond to the consultation, which closes on 5<sup>th</sup> March. RJ would be happy to forward the main issues which Stevenage has identified. Mott MacDonald has been appointed to update work previously carried out and there are funding possibilities between the Pinch Point and Route Based Strategies. RJ was due to see Jenny Volp (Highways Agency) that week.
50. JG expressed the opinion that a fair amount of traffic using the A602 from various parts of East Herts would ultimately be heading towards the A1(M).

### **Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople**

51. BT stated that, in context of the big picture, Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople issues were only a small part; however, they were capable of generating a significant response.
52. KM briefed the group on the Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment that was currently being undertaken by consultants and due to conclude by the end of March. This would be shortly followed by a Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople Identification of Potential Sites Study to be finalised by summer this year.

53. BT noted the differences between permanent and transit provision.
54. KM confirmed that both issues were being covered by the Accommodation Needs Assessment.
55. JG considered that it would be helpful if the total capacity in Hertfordshire as a whole were known. This could be compared to the previous RSS policy.
56. RJ commented that, from a Stevenage perspective, David Couttie has completed the traveller element of the SHMA. This has identified a need for five pitches, which are likely to be provided on the existing Dyes Lane site. The HCA own all the land around this site. While HCC are not open to taking on new sites for Gypsies and Travellers, they are likely to continue their responsibility for new pitches on existing sites. The previous representative that Stevenage had been negotiating with at the HCA had been amenable to the expansion of the Dyes Lane site on their land and dialogue has now commenced with that person's replacement to progress the issue.
57. Beyond this provision, there has been a need identified for an additional three to five pitches to be provided every five years. This is beyond the capacity of the Dyes Lane site to accommodate. Therefore a new site will need to be found. When the SNAP initiative was to be progressed it was understood that a site could be identified in that area, but North Herts had indicated that this would need to meet the needs of that authority too. However, the current North Herts position appears to be that their needs could be met at the existing site at Codicote another site elsewhere in the district, to the need to identify a new site would no longer apply. Therefore, Stevenage would need to look elsewhere.
58. RJ confirmed that there were no Travelling Showpeople's sites in Stevenage.

#### **Technical Evidence**

59. BT stated that in terms of employment, the Council had obtained strategic and economic advice around HMAs and journey to work areas. Apart from GSK in Ware, East Herts' strength lies in SMEs and rural RDPEs etc.
60. MC commented that, following the successful spending of all grant allocations over a five year period, the LEP was happy to support East Herts Council as the lead for economic strategy in rural areas.
61. BT noted that Bishop's Stortford is the main market town, but the district has a large commuter role by providing workers that can afford to live in East Herts with movement out to London and other locations.
62. MC detailed that the Charringtons site in Bishop's Stortford was now clear of Judicial Review and will be the focus of redevelopment as a

commercial centre for the town centre along with the Goods Yard site and the waterfront.

63. BT commented that the Goods Yard is a large brownfield site and that a consortium of Network Rail and Kier Property, known as Solum, have been responsible for bringing forward similar sites elsewhere, concentrating firstly in London and working their way outwards.
64. MC stated that the bringing forward of the site depends on the new franchisee to be appointed and the relationship of the development with Bishop's Stortford station. It will be important to ensure good sustainable links with other modes of transport beyond rail and that the town centre should retain its character while increasing business presence in Bishop's Stortford.
65. BT noted that Bishop's Stortford has a strong relationship with many satellite towns around it.
66. MC discussed, in terms of evidence base, that advice is being sought on the retail side of the town centres to ascertain what the district's High Streets are likely to look like in 20 years time and to make sure that they are fit for purpose in respect of providing necessary goods and services for their populations.

#### **Neighbourhood Planning**

67. BT detailed that Neighbourhood Planning is proving popular in East Herts with progress being made in several settlements. Bishop's Stortford is currently consulting on a draft Neighbourhood Plan to cover two wards of the town.
68. Ware has not yet declared whether or not it will bring forward its own document or whether work on the BL DPD could encompass the whole of the town as many of the issues could be duplicated.
69. MC noted that, for Hertford, the future of Bircherley Green and the economic viability of the area going forward would be a key issue. Sawbridgeworth has been awaiting the publication of the draft District Plan prior to developing its own document. Buntingford had prepared a draft Plan favouring development to the north and south of the town, but the pre-emptive applications and subsequent appeal decisions to the east of the town had resulted in permissions outside of that scope.

#### **Other**

70. The meeting concluded with all concurring that there was a need to agree a MOU in due course to progress both authorities' plans. A further meeting would be held in due course to discuss this issue.

***As of 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014, Stevenage Borough Council had not responded to requests for comment on the meeting notes, but had been made aware that they are being made public.***