

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 10 JULY 2012

REPORT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

BISHOP'S STORTFORD - TOWN CENTRE BOUNDARY PROPOSAL

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All Bishop's Stortford's Wards

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To seek support for agreement of a Town Centre Boundary for Bishops Stortford Town Centre as one of the mechanisms that will help direct improvement in the town in the short, medium and longer term.

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNCIL:</u> that:	
(A)	the town centre boundary as defined by the Chase and Partners Retail and Town Centres Study 2008 and attached to this report be agreed;
(B)	the boundary as described be adopted by East Herts Council for the purposes of informing the East Herts District Plan and be given the status of material consideration in any planning matters relating to the area described; and
(C)	in describing the town boundary, emphasis is given to sustainable mixed uses, retail led / services activities in line with the Central Government guidance as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Bishop's Stortford 20 20 group was initiated by the Leader of the Council to bring together a wide range of representative groups to develop a shared vision for the town. Despite the inevitable difference of views in such a group, they developed and published "A Vision for Bishop's Stortford" to help deliver the best

possible outcomes for the town. The document clearly articulates the shared aims, aspirations and desired outcomes for the people of the town.

- 1.2 In order to support those outcomes, the group has so far developed two site specific briefs for key areas within the town centre. These have been adopted by East Herts Council as the planning authority for the district to provide guidance and be a material consideration in the event of any development proposals coming forward for those sites.
- 1.3 The group next turned its attention to the town centre retail-led activities to consider what action might be best taken to influence achievement of positive outcomes for the town.
- 1.4 At their February 2012 meeting Members of the Bishop's Stortford 20 20 Group received a presentation to consider opportunities to improve the outcomes for South Street and its environs as a possible platform for developing and promoting the economic vitality of the town and securing the retail led/ service / leisure offer of the town.
- 1.5 The propositions endeavoured to move forward the long standing proposals to pedestrianise existed in the Bishops Stortford Transport Study of 2006 and elsewhere. The debate had also considered how the pedestrianisation proposition might be improved by the ideas developed by The Department of Transport around "Shared Space" (October 2011)
- 1.6 A number of the group participated in a workshop on 21 March 2012. In particular the working group should undertake to draft a map of what would be considered the 'Town Centre' and articulate a list of possible objectives for the town under a number of themes:
 - Improvements to Town Centre?
 - Pedestrianised and / or Shared Space?
 - Town Centre Boundary?
 - Optimum Circulation?
 - Outcome Targets?

The group focused its discussions on the subject areas of the town centre boundary and pedestrianisation / shared space

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The principle underpinning for this work is that defining town centre boundaries encourages particular modes of development to take place within those boundaries. Potential development sites within the boundaries will automatically have to be considered as part of any sequential assessment for any proposed out-of-centre development.
- 2.2 When defining these boundaries the historic core of the town centre is considered as well as main land uses, the curtilage of properties they occupy and the local geography. It covers the diversity of main town uses from shopping, leisure, and services to parking and potential for accommodating future growth and how to manage change in the town centre.
- 2.3 East Herts Council – Retail and Town Centre Study carried out by Chase and Partners in 2008 identified a retail led town centre boundary for Bishop’s Stortford and recommended that the Local Development Framework define the town centre boundaries for all towns in the District. The study was reported to the Local Development Framework Executive Panel meeting held on 17th July 2008 and the LDF Panel agreed that this study forms part of the evidence base to inform and support the East Herts LDF. (The adopted East Herts Local Plan does not currently define town centre boundaries for the main towns in East Hertfordshire.) The boundary proposed is attached as **Essential Reference Paper B**.
- 2.4 The town centre boundary as suggested by Chase and Partner was discussed and debated:-

Some of the key issues raised at the workshop included:

- Extension of the boundary to incorporate the whole of the Goods Yard Development Brief site
 - Inclusion of Apton Road and Link Road car park.
 - Inclusion of other destinations such as the Castle mound
 - Notwithstanding that the town uses cover other land uses including leisure; the defined boundary should be retail/service use lead.
 - The workshop subsequently reported back
- 2.5 The recently published National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) under Section 2 - Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres

states that:

- Planning policies should be positive, promote competitive town centre environments and set out policies for the management and growth of centres over the planned period.
- Define the extent of town centres and primary shopping areas, based on a clear definition of primary and secondary frontages in designated centres and set policies that make clear which uses will be permitted in such locations.
- Promote competitive town centres and provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer which reflect the individuality of the town centre.
- Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with the up to date Local Plan.

2.6 The defined boundary includes the primary and secondary frontages and other main town centre uses which are met in full and not compromised by limited site availability and accordingly complies with the NPPF.

2.7 The group believed that the suggested boundary would sufficiently accommodate the need for retail, leisure and other town centre uses. It would also support the principle that major employment use, in the form of offices are focused on the edge of the boundary where their sustainability would benefit from proximity to the excellent public transport hub. After extensive debate, the consensus of the workshop was that given the dominance of shopping and public transport hub and pedestrian flows that exist in the town centre; the boundary, as suggested by Chase and Partner, should be adopted.

2.8 The Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport welcomes the 20 20 Vision Group endorsement of the town centre boundary for Bishop's Stortford as defined by the Chase and Partner Retail Study 2008 as part of a Local Initiative. It is considered that adoption of these principles would assist as part of the evidence base, supporting the District Plan, and informing future decisions concerning retail development and town centres.

2.9 The Bishop's Stortford 20 20 Group recommends to East Herts Council that the boundary as described should be adopted by East Herts Council for the purposes of informing the East Herts District Plan and be given the status of material consideration in

any planning matters relating to the area described.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

A Vision for Bishop's Stortford – BS 20 20 group

Contact Member: Tony Jackson – Leader of East Herts Council
anthony.jackson@eastherts.gov.uk

Contact Officer: George A Robertson – Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services – ext 1410
george.a.robertson@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Authors: George A Robertson – Chief Executive and Director of Customer and Community Services – ext 1410
Anil Khosla – Planning Advisor - ext 1592