

Meeting Notes
Welwyn Hatfield Emerging Core Strategy
East Herts District Plan Part 1: Strategy

Date: Friday 30th November, 2012

Venue: Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council offices, Welwyn Garden City

Attendees

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (WHBC):

- Cllr Mandy Perkins, Executive Member for Planning and Business
- Sue Tiley, Planning Policy and Implementation Manager
- Paul Everard, Principal Planning Officer

East Herts District Council (EHDC):

- Cllr Linda Haysey, Executive Member for Health, Housing, and Community Support
- Bryan Thomsett, Planning Policy Manager
- Martin Paine, Senior Planning Officer

These notes have been agreed by all attendees as a true reflection of the meeting, and have been agreed for publication on either/both Councils' websites.

Meeting Notes

1. It was discussed that some joint technical work had already been undertaken, but as the plans of both districts advance it was felt to be important that there be political engagement at this stage.
2. Cllr Haysey explained that Cllr Carver is unwell and therefore she had been asked to stand in for him at this meeting. Cllr Haysey is a Member of the Executive (i.e. Cabinet) with responsibility for Housing, and one of two Members of the District Planning Executive Panel (along with Councillor Carver, who chairs the Panel).
3. Cllr Haysey declared that she is also local Ward Member for Hertford Rural South, and therefore has a local interest in the area east of Welwyn Garden City indicated as an area of Potential Expansion (PE) in Welwyn Hatfield's emerging Core Strategy.
4. Cllr Perkins explained that she is the Executive Member for Planning and Business and she represents Welwyn West Ward in the north of Welwyn Hatfield Borough.
5. Welwyn Hatfield's broad locations for growth were reviewed, as shown on the Key Diagram within the Emerging Core Strategy. Sue Tiley explained that due to

NPPF requirements urban extensions/Green Belt release would be necessary, although it would not be possible to meet objectively assessed needs as set out in the Housing Background Paper Part One.

6. It was explained that there had been very strong representations to earlier consultations by WHBC to avoid development in the villages. This, combined with the greater advantages of concentrating growth in the towns with better opportunities for proximity of housing to jobs, services and facilities, had led to a strategy focused on Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City.
7. The WHBC Emerging Core Strategy area of Proposed Expansion (PE) east of Welwyn Garden City within East Herts was discussed. It was acknowledged that although WHBC cannot propose this land, and that the decision of whether or not to bring forward the land lies with EHDC as Local Planning Authority for the area, WHBC would support a decision by EHDC to do so.
8. In the Emerging Core Strategy Panshanger Aerodrome is proposed for 700 dwellings, plus 15 Gypsy and Traveller pitches. To the south, the landowners Lafarge have not been able to give Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council any confidence that land south of Birchall Lane could be developed for housing in a coherent form, perhaps because of the implications of decontamination.
9. EHDC District Plan options were explained. 69 initial 'areas of search' at all settlements had been carefully assessed, and a shortlist of options, including the area East of Welwyn Garden City, and other significant options such as Harlow North, had been agreed by the Council for further testing and assessment. However, although East Herts is a larger district, the technical work to date had demonstrated that, like Welwyn Hatfield, there are many constraints to development, and the number of reasonable development options is limited. It is proposed to bring forward a draft Preferred Strategy to the District Planning Executive Panel meeting on 21st February, and 12 weeks consultation in April-July 2013.
10. It was discussed that area PE is relatively unconstrained, well located in relation to Welwyn Garden City and Moneyhole Park, has spare capacity in the sewerage network, has low flood risk, is well screened by tree belts, and has good access to the A414.
11. The potential for area PE to accommodate a new secondary school was discussed. The area is relatively flat and therefore suitable for school playing fields. This could help to alleviate the pressure on school places within the town, and provide capacity for development at Panshanger also.

12. The employment potential of area PE was discussed. DTZ had recently completed a technical study for EHDC, which suggested that given proximity to the A414, a small employment allocation could be feasible, although in reality the majority of residents would be likely to seek work in the wider travel to work area, in Welwyn Garden City Employment Area or perhaps at Hatfield Business Park nearby. The possibility of business incubator units was discussed. It was acknowledged that the main strength of East Herts lies in the SME sector, and there are no intentions to change that emphasis to attract bigger businesses.
13. WHBC's approach to housing is set out in two background papers. In Part 1, WHBC decided the housing requirement based on consideration of a balance of different projections including migration and economic development. Part 2 then looked at housing distribution options to meet that target. EHDC's approach to housing is to identify a range of housing options (10,000-17,000 dwellings) and then test the capacity of the district and the ability to deliver at both ends of the range.
14. Within the Emerging Core Strategy, the figure of 400 dwellings within area PE is based on a) the need to meet the identified Borough-wide housing need of 400 dwellings per year and b) acknowledgement that, given the need to extract the underlying mineral deposits prior to development, some of the development would occur after the end of the plan period. It was observed that without the numbers shown in the housing trajectory within East Herts, the actual proposed housing target for WHBC is 378 dwellings per annum.
15. Transport was discussed. The Inter-Urban Route Strategy (IURS) led by the County Council is acknowledged to require further input from all the Districts, particularly as the details of their emerging strategies become available. Transport modelling has been undertaken and the results are being shared between WHBC and EHDC, the County Council in its function as Transport authority and the Highways Agency.
16. The following issues were raised as needing further joint consideration, if EHDC bring forward this option:
 - funding arrangements, for example in relation to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and how the money would be apportioned fairly to relevant service providers;
 - a suitable policy vehicle will be needed for more detailed work towards a high quality urban design framework;
 - consideration of requirement to demonstrate agreement at Examination in Public, perhaps involving a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU);
 - Co-operation on planning for Gypsy and Traveller sites;
 - Joint discussion of school provision with the County Council;

- Hertfordshire-wide position statement on the housing numbers set out in CLG/ONS projections – could LEP endorse this?

17. It was noted that the Emerging Core Strategy consultation ends on January 18th. EHDC will agree an official response through a Non-Key report before submission to WHBC.

18. It was agreed that there should be a further meeting after the end of Welwyn Hatfield Borough council's consultation on their Emerging Core Strategy and associated documents, but before East Hertfordshire District Council's District Plan consultation starts.

END.

Post Meeting Note: Since this meeting took place the consultation period has been extended to 31st January 2013.

Meet the Neighbours - North Herts District Council

Date: Wednesday 24 April 2013

Present: Cllr Mike Carver (EHC)
Claire Sime (EHC)
Jenny Pierce (EHC)
Cllr Tom Brindley (NHDC)
Louise Symes (NHDC)

Matters Discussed

The A1(M) Corridor
Airports
Community Infrastructure Levy
Gypsies and Travellers
Progress with Local/District Plans

The A1(M) Corridor

1. Discussion was had over the importance of the A1(M) in supporting the existing and potential development of North Herts District Council, Welwyn Hatfield, Stevenage and Central Bedfordshire Boroughs. The four councils have drafted a letter to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to converse with the Secretary of State for Transport to highlight the apparent inconsistencies in their approach. The A1(M) cannot cope under existing pressures and there are no plans to improve the capacity of the road. Without these improvements, major development along this corridor will not be possible. NHDC requested that East Herts may wish to counter-sign this letter as there are many issues associated with the A1(M) that affect East Herts. EHC agreed to counter-sign this letter to add support to the arguments.

Airports

2. NHDC do not object in principle to the Luton Airport increasing passenger numbers if it can be contained within existing infrastructure. The Council does not think that such an increase can be met without major infrastructure improvements. The Council would therefore continue to seek restrictions on noise, transport etc and would also seek mitigation measures from any development of the Airport. It was felt that because the development of the Airport has national importance, any application should be dealt with nationally rather than just by the local authority.
3. East Herts had equally responded concerning Luton Airport and impacts on the infrastructure.

4. EHC noted similar concerns with Stansted Airport and a consistent approach in terms of acknowledging the benefits the proximity to the airports bring, but limiting the downsides of this proximity. Now that Manchester Airports Group own the airport they appear to be much more open about what the ambitions for the airport services are and because of their shared background in local government, understand our concerns and our potential role in the continued success of the airport.
5. EHC suggested that NHDC consider becoming members of SASIG (Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group).

Gypsies and Travellers

6. Discussion occurred about an appeal at a site in Welwyn Hatfield Borough where the five year land supply was raised as an issue in considering the appeal. The Council only fractionally won the appeal but the impression was that unless they resolved the issue over the supply of pitches, if the appeal came round again it would be allowed. NHDC were concerned because they have a similar site with potentially similar issues. They have a site which could accommodate an additional pitch but the site is occupied by a single family and may be unlikely to accommodate any other family.
7. A brief discussion occurred over the Birch Green Site in Hertingfordbury which has yet to receive a decision. EHC indicated that the Council were preparing to tender for an update to our needs assessment, however, we were constrained by the lack of a decision by PINS over the status of the occupiers at the Esbies site in Sawbridgeworth. EHC were writing to PINS to request a speedier decision in order to enable the Council to continue in the preparation of the evidence base.
8. NHDC indicated that as part of the previous SNAP proposal, consideration was given to providing a G&T site. This may still be considered as an option to the north east of their housing option location to the north of Stevenage. NHDC questioned whether a cross-border site could be allowed under the NPPF. NHDC are presently undertaking a G&T assessment.
9. NHDC indicated a desire to increase the sharing of knowledge, particularly when families are moving around. There was also a desire to see a county-wide action plan, a common approach to dealing with illegal encampments.
10. EH Indicated it had a procedure in place and had been successful in quickly bringing court orders against illegal encampments. NHDC wished for this information to be shared.

CIL

11. NHDC explained that the work they have done so far indicates that as they have a variety of land values depending on their location a single charge would not be realistic. Although they expressed some concern about the practicality of the CIL in the long term, NHDC are continuing to prepare a CIL in parallel with the plan.
12. EHC agreed with this doubt mainly because the long term projections involved are just guesswork after a certain timeframe and stated that there are many benefits of the Section 106 system such as the ability to negotiate on a site-by-site basis. There were also issues with CIL relating to the fact that utility providers do not plan for more than 10 years, and five years with any certainty. EHC suggested that there may be a delay with releasing a CIL charging schedule until it is more certain on the proposed development strategy. A separate CIL consultation may be necessary. EHC were concerned about the slowing down of the process related to introducing CIL and the requirements of further evidence bases. In turn, this would have an impact on the deliverability of the District Plan without resolution.

Local Plan Update

13. EHC cannot move forward without evidence relating to education and highways. The schools across EH are at capacity and the uncertainty of free schools and academies makes education planning more complicated.
14. EHC wish to speak to the Government regarding having a plan which is fully evidenced for the first 10 years with reviews every five years.
15. NHDC are of the view that the County Council have a statutory duty to provide for the education needs of children, and that the lack of school places should not necessarily prevent NHDC from giving consideration to building houses. NHDC do have capacity in some of its schools and the proposed strategic sites would need to make provision for additional education needs.
16. EHC disagreed. It is necessary to have a deliverable plan. Huge demographic changes are forcing up needs. EHC have a close working relationship with the County Council and have been receiving advice on education planning to assist with the plan preparation. EHC have information regarding primary level capacity issues and are awaiting secondary level information. There are capacity issues at all levels across the district. EHC indicated that it wouldn't feel comfortable proceeding on the basis that it is someone else's problem. EHC want to plan properly to address issues such as community infrastructure and indicated that the County Council would be likely to object to a plan which did not adequately address the educational need of its residents.

17. With regards to policy preparation, EH is combining two plans into one single District Plan. Each policy area is being dealt with as a whole to create flexible policies, making them user-friendly and suitable for both the short and longer term.
18. EHC do not have a five year land supply. EHC have a wide housing figure range of between 10 and 17 thousand homes, and indicated that recent demographic forecasts are indicating the need to plan for towards the upper end of this range.
19. NHDC advised that they had a SHMA undertaken in 2012 which demonstrates a range of figures. The proposed figure of 10 700 is considered a reasonable number and takes into consideration low trend migration, including impacts of migration associated with Great Ashby and the East of England forecasting model, based on economic considerations. . The evidence in place for available sites from their SHLAA indicate they have three times the amount of available land than they need for their housing need.
20. NHDC wish to see Stevenage's evidence with regards to housing need rather than their aspirations. NHDC indicate that their response to Stevenage is that SBC should continue to look all around their borders to accommodate their needs.
21. NHDC indicated that Central Bedfordshire Council have a different approach and are pushing NHDC to use the same approach – to allocate the needs arising from immigration on a town-by-town basis. C.Beds have indicated that if they then cannot accommodate migration needs other locations including NHDC should accommodate them instead. NHDC stated that if they had to accommodate this type of need as well it would push their housing figure to much more than they need even at their own higher migration level suggests.
22. On other cross-boundary issues, EHC indicated that Welwyn Hatfield Council had allocated 400 homes of it's targets in land within EH. Cllr Brindley stated that as his interests lie in Hertingfordbury as well, that the parish might accept some form of development contiguous with Welwyn Garden City as it could see some of the benefits to the community that could be gained from CIL contributions and other development gains.
23. EHC indicated they intend to consult on their preferred strategy towards the end of 2013, and have set up a working forum of 15 Members covering the whole district to comment and advise on the emerging planning policies. Officers have been meeting regularly with Development Management colleagues on the policies.
24. NHDC plan to submit in June 2014 following a Local Plan consultation in January 2014. They have a Local Plan Working Party with comprising 7 Members and would consider expanding the spread of Members like

EHC have. NHDC are also working closely with Development Management colleagues on policies.

25. As part of their Housing Growth consultation, NHDC undertook roadshows where the whole Policy team met members of the public in an open format. More than 1,200 people attended and most of them that did have not responded to the consultation. They get the impression that even if they don't like what is being proposed, at least they now understand the process and the reasons for the proposals.
26. With regards to site-specifics, NHDC indicated that the proposal to the north of Stevenage may require an additional access around Great Ashby Park which would be on land in EH. Local electricity pylons could be buried, which may have enabled access through the pylon corridor but the national grid lines could not be buried which may prevent this opportunity.
27. The land to the west of Stevenage is still being held by the Secretary of State who has yet to make a decision. NHDC have been told that the SoS/Planning Inspectorate are unlikely to re-open an inquiry on this land until they know if it is included in NHDC Local Plan. NHDC don't know whether to include it in their Plan until they receive a decision from the SoS.
28. Other smaller sites would not impinge on EHC and were not discussed. Knebworth was discussed as a potential location for locally significant growth. Four sites are proposed but the local school is already too small for the current demand. EHC suggested a land swap could be possible and that the levels of local growth combined with existing demand may result in the need for a new single form of entry primary school.

Future Work

29. Both authorities agreed for further meetings on a similar basis as required in the future. Both agreed on the usefulness of meetings of this kind and welcomed the sharing of practice and information.

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

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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

6. 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.

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.

11. 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.
12. 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.