

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL – 22 OCTOBER 2015

REPORT BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

DISTRICT PLAN TRANSPORTATION – A414, HERTFORD

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report discusses the transportation issues related to the A414, Hertford which have been identified by Hertfordshire County Council as Transport Authority, and the consequential implications that arise in respect of progressing the District Plan.

RECOMMENDATION FOR DISTRICT PLANNING EXECUTIVE PANEL: That Council, via the Executive, be advised that:

(A)	the contents of the letter dated 27 July 2015 from Hertfordshire County Council Highways Development Management in respect of transportation issues identified on the A414, Hertford, be noted; and
(B)	Hertfordshire County Council be urged to give highest priority to expediting the completion of its COMET transportation model and publication of its emerging Transportation Vision and that East Herts Council is most willing to assist this process, if considered appropriate.

1.0 Background

1.1 In papers at 'Item 8' later on the agenda, a report is included on the Delivery Study. This important Study will form a key part of the wider evidence base to support the preparation of the emerging District Plan as it progresses towards Pre-Submission, and thereon to the Examination stage.

1.2 As part of the Delivery Study, a Transport Note has been appended which discusses wide-ranging transport issues in

respect of the context of potential site delivery across the district. At certain points, within both the main Delivery Study and the appended Transport Note, reference is made to a letter dated 27th July sent by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) to this Council regarding the A414, Hertford.

1.3 Prior to reading the Delivery Study report, it is considered appropriate that Members should be made aware of the contents of the HCC letter, the background to it, and the potential consequences of the matters it raises.

2.0 Report

2.1 Paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework, March 2012 (NPPF) details that Local Plans should be:

- *Positively prepared – the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;*
- *Justified – the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;*
- *Effective – the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and*
- *Consistent with national policy – the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework*

2.2 In the context of these NPPF requirements, the ability of the highways network to accommodate additional traffic movements therefore forms a key part of the assessment process in considering any potential development sites for inclusion in the emerging District Plan.

2.3 Furthermore, the later issued Department for Transport (DfT) Planning Practice Guidance update 'Transport evidence bases in plan making' (October 2014) (NPPG) provides further information to assist local planning authorities assess strategic transport

needs to reflect and, where appropriate, mitigate these in their Local Plan.

2.4 Paragraph 003 of that guidance details key issues which should be taken into consideration in developing a transport evidence base to support a local plan. These include the need to:

- *assess the existing situation and likely generation of trips over time by all modes and the impact on the locality in economic, social and environmental terms;*
- *assess the opportunities to support a pattern of development that, where reasonable to do so, facilitates the use of sustainable modes of transport;*
- *highlight and promote opportunities to reduce the need for travel where appropriate;*
- *identify opportunities to prioritise the use of alternative modes in both existing and new development locations if appropriate;*
- *consider the cumulative impacts of existing and proposed development on transport networks;*
- *assess the quality and capacity of transport infrastructure and its ability to meet forecast demands; and*
- *identify the short, medium and long-term transport proposals across all modes.*

2.5 At a local level East Herts Council has worked with HCC, as transport authority, to ensure that potential development options are considered within the terms of Government Guidance.

2.6 Under the emerging District Plan 'Stepped Approach' sieving process, a series of 'traffic light' Topic Assessments were carried out and these were reported to the District Planning Executive Panel in 2012 as part of the early consideration of the possible options for spatial distribution of development. HCC Highways officers were heavily involved in the conclusions reached on the two highways related assessments for the Areas of Search at that stage.

2.7 Sub-sections within Areas of Search were considered on an individual basis in terms of the potential traffic impacts. However,

particularly in respect of Hertford, it became apparent that these individual assessments would not be sufficient on their own and that cumulative impacts of development in and around the town and in the wider locale would also need to be considered, especially in relation to additional movements on the A414 through the town, which is already subject to peak time congestion.

- 2.8 At the time of the Preferred Options Consultation, which ran between February 27th and May 22nd 2014, work had been commissioned by HCC to, *inter alia*, better understand the likely impact of future development on the A414 corridor in this location. However, at that time the AECOM work had not yet concluded. Therefore, the transport element of the HCC response to the Preferred Options Consultation was couched in terms of the information available at that time:

A414 Hertford - The A414 is one of the strategic east-west routes across the County. It will therefore be impacted by all the proposed developments in Hertford and other developments proposed in the wider area. In Hertford, issues on the A414 put additional pressure on the Ware Road bus corridor which is the main access route for buses serving the area. As a consequence, and following the adoption of the Inter Urban Route Strategy, a Paramics transport model of the A414 corridor through Hertford has been prepared to test the cumulative impacts of growth in Hertfordshire against the suggested online interventions in the Hertford and Ware Urban Transport Plan.

The tests have shown that the road is currently operating close to capacity, with the A414 roundabouts at Hale Road / Parliament Square and Ware Road / London Road / Fore Street (Bluecoats) junction in particular, having capacity issues. These areas form critical parts of the local bus network and would have significant issues for local bus operators in terms of service provision and the viability of services.

Though the work undertaken to date has indicated that the A414 corridor performance between the A10 and Hale Road can potentially be improved by the combination of individual junction improvement options, the potential release of latent demand is likely to lead to pinch-points elsewhere along the corridor.

These measures tested to date would not free up enough capacity to accommodate large volumes of additional development and hence the issues on the A414 are therefore a potential constraint on growth. A clearer understanding of this issue will be required prior to submission, hence further transport analysis work is therefore required to consider what further mitigation measures exist and their respective feasibility.

- 2.9 The final iteration of the options testing in the A414 Study (see ***Essential Reference Paper 'B'***) was released to this Council in January 2015 and this concurred with HCC's previous Preferred Options response position that there were very limited opportunities for online improvements to significantly increase capacity on the A414 at Hertford.
- 2.10 Since that time, officers of East Herts Council have been in dialogue with HCC and have pressed for clarification on their position in order to understand what the potential implications of these findings might be for the emerging Development Strategy.
- 2.11 In particular, there was a need to understand how HCC would view these options in relation to applying the 'severity test' for assessing the residual cumulative impacts of growth proposed in the emerging District Plan. The need for this test is established both within the NPPG and NPPF as follows:
- NPPG (paragraph 003) which highlights the need for Local Plan transport evidence bases to *"consider the cumulative impacts of existing and proposed development on transport networks"*;
- and*
- NPPF (paragraph 32) which states that *"development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe"*.
- 2.12 Given that no definition of what constitutes "severe" has been acknowledged by the Government, and in the absence of relevant case law, this is therefore currently generally accepted as a matter of local determination. Therefore, the importance of understanding HCC's position in relation to the severity of any proposed development which would impact on the A414 through Hertford is crucial in taking forward the emerging District Plan.

- 2.13 To this end, and following several discussions on the subject in relation to the form of the A414 Study as it currently stands not including all necessary information, a written request was sent in June 2015 seeking written clarification of HCC's position (see ***Essential Reference Paper 'C'***). This set out the key matters which were viewed as being essential to be addressed in order to allow East Herts Council to have a sufficiently robust evidence base on the A414 issue to allow progression to the Pre-Submission stage.
- 2.14 Following further clarification to HCC regarding the information being sought, a letter of response was received on 27th July (see ***Essential Reference Paper 'D'***).
- 2.15 There are several key messages in this letter of response that need to be understood.
- 2.16 Firstly, it is likely that it would be possible for planned development identified in the first five years of the emerging District Plan to be accommodated, subject to detailed assessment and suitable mitigation measures being identified.
- 2.17 However, beyond that period, congestion (occasioned both by traffic movements generated by development as proposed in the Preferred Options consultation and from wider areas outside of the district) would be such as to preclude delivery without a strategic intervention for the A414 through Hertford.
- 2.18 In particular, the letter highlights that indicators of the anticipated severe traffic congestion identified from HCC's studies on the A414 beyond the first five years' level of growth would include:
- Regular instances of traffic blocking key junctions and queuing back on the current free flowing lanes of the A10.
 - Significant increases in delays were also predicted on the wider local road network that would resulting *[sic]* in
 - subsequent impacts on key public transport routes,
 - inappropriate routing of traffic through the town centre and residential roads (including villages)
 - The likely expansion of the existing traffic related air quality management area (AQMA).

- 2.19 Furthermore, the letter acknowledges that further work is required to ascertain further information to plug the evidence gap and that HCC is currently developing a Countywide Transport Model (COMET) which will provide a platform to test strategic mitigation measures to growth scenarios across Hertfordshire. This model will feed into the emerging HCC 'Transport Vision' (a successor to Local Transport Plan 3), which will then identify packages of transport interventions to enable growth across the county to 2050.
- 2.20 Unfortunately, while currently under development, the COMET model is not due to be available to test options until early 2016 and the subsequent draft 'Transport Vision' will not be published until Summer 2016. This draft document, which will (when adopted) become the replacement for the current Local Transport Plan (LTP3), will include a draft list of prioritised schemes that will then be subject to public consultation. It is anticipated that the final prioritised list of schemes will then be agreed by HCC by October/November 2016 to inform the bidding process for funding to enable delivery.
- 2.21 While Essex County Council's VISUM transportation model, which is under development and due to be completed in a shorter timescale, can provide some evidence on the A414 to the east of the district, it is not detailed enough in the Hertford area (especially to the west of the town) to provide a robust evidence base that would be fit for purpose to enable the District Plan to satisfy an Inspector at Examination. To seek to progress without such evidence in place would be most likely to result in the Plan being found unsound.
- 2.22 In order to try to expedite the progress of the COMET model to enable publication of the 'Transport Vision' in a shorter timescale East Herts officers have therefore explored the possibility of providing assistance to HCC. However, HCC officers consider that the timescale cannot be reduced due to the technical procedure involved in building the model and that additional resources would not advance the process.
- 2.23 Therefore, to summarise, the HCC position as it currently stands is that:
- a. the identified congestion resulting from proposed development in the draft District Plan Preferred Options version would be such as to preclude the delivery of that Strategy beyond the first five years in the locations currently

proposed without a strategic intervention for the A414 at Hertford;

- b. any potential mitigation measures will not become clear until the COMET model is available and the subsequent 'Transport Vision' is published;
- c. the 'Transport Vision' will not be available until at least mid-2016, with public consultation to follow, which will then result in a final prioritised list of schemes being available by October/November 2016.

2.24 However, although HCC has confirmed that it will not have all the information and modelling tools that will be required to fully test the highway network implications of the potential growth identified across the whole plan period until the middle of next year, it is important to note that HCC is keen to continue to work with this Council to agree an interim position for the next stage of consultation on the District Plan and to agree what material will be available by the time of the Examination. So that this Council is able to demonstrate full deliverability of the emerging District Plan, HCC has given assurances that it considers it a priority to work together to ensure that it can provide the most effective support to East Herts over the next 12 months and through into implementation and delivery.

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

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (General) (<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>)
- Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Transport Evidence Bases) (<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/transport-evidence-bases-in-plan-making/transport-evidence-bases-in-plan-making-guidance/>)

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