

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

24 NOVEMBER 2021

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Beauchamp
Birnie (Chairman)
England
Harden
McDowell
Stevens
Taylor
Timmis
Wilkie
C Wyatt-Lowe

Officers:	Rebecca Connolly	Environmental Health Lead Officer (Food Health and Safety)
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Alex Robinson	
	Chris Taylor	Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Emma Walker	Group Manager - Environmental and Community Protection
	Sara Whelan	Group Manager - Development Management and Planning

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

1 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr Silwal and Cllr Hearn

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

5 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

There were no matters subject to call in

6 HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES

N Bateman provided a map showing the outline of the Hemel Garden Communities including wider routes shown with green arrows. The area hatched pink on the map was shown as the Hertford Innovation Quarter commercial area.

There has been a policy update with the Department for Transport's decarbonising plan and 2021 has seen a spatial vision presented that has been endorsed by the Council's cabinet and by Hertfordshire County Council, as well as it being noted by St Albans.

N Bateman explained that other work streams include the framework plan. This particular piece of work is looking at delivering a spatial plan and strategic infrastructure for the growth areas. Work on the transport plan is continuing at pace with a range of stakeholder and council engagement activities since May 2021.

The Council has received funding from the government and significant commitments of contributions from the 3 authorities. There has also been further work on communications of engagement as well as a draft strategy with branding and a website that should be delivered by February.

N Bateman showed a diagram showing the key workstreams. The spatial vision is the overarching document that influences all of the work that is done. The key workstreams include the transport plan, the framework plan, the infrastructure delivery plan and the transformation workstream. The transformation workstream will include some further evidence such as green infrastructure strategy and working alongside the Hemel Place team to make sure transformation is delivered together.

N Bateman explained that the transport plan runs to 2050 and it's key for informing the local plans. The transport plan will also set a vision, goal and aims as well as costed transport interventions with a phasing delivery plan. This includes an active travel network focusing on walking and cycling and delivering transport hubs or multi modal transport interchanges. They will be focused at local centres and key destinations. The idea is to create a network for the bus improvements.

Another big move, N Bateman noted, is the Hertford and Essex rapid transit system. This cuts across the town, starting at Hemel Hempstead railway station and working along the A414 corridor towards Harlow.

The future sees improvements to the bus network, behaviour change, low traffic neighbourhoods, changes to parking, freight and emerging technologies, such as

electric vehicle charging, e-scooters and e-bikes and whatever comes forward in the future. The framework plan is a concept spatial plan that sets out spatial and infrastructure framework requirements for the new growth areas and transformational requirements for the wider town. This will set out the scope of the strategic infrastructure that is needed to support the new integrated neighbourhoods with the new local centres, the commercial development, as part of Herts IQ, social infrastructure services and facilities and supporting active and sustainable travel infrastructure and much more.

The Hemel Garden Communities Programme has a governance structure that includes member engagement through the delivery board and it is through the councillor visioning group that meets regularly. This comprises 5 representatives from St Albans, 5 from Dacorum and 1 from the County Council. There are also engagement activities with members as the strategy develops. In addition, there is a webinar on 15th December to share specialist knowledge on sustainable transport. In addition, public engagement activity during February on the transport survey is expected.

Cllr Birnie asked what 40% of affordable homes means in real numbers.

N Bateman replied that HGC of the 11,500 homes that are planned to be built as part of future housing delivery (which includes 5,500 in St Albans), 40% overall will be affordable. NB will deliver more information about the mix and tenure when this is known.

Cllr Timmis spoke about the impact of future homes being built in Great Gaddesden on its residents with the number of homes proposed to increase from 600 to 6,000. PT also asked for more information on the proposed road linking the M1 to the area.

N Bateman explained that the Great Gaddesden parish was being consulted already. The proposed road is part of the framework plan and transport plan. The road is about delivering local links to the town and not about have orbital movement between the M1 and Leighton Buzzard Road. As part of the consultation on the road the Council has workshops taking place currently.

Cllr Beauchamp did not feel that e-scooters should be encouraged as part of the plan when they are not currently legal on the roads, unless they are part of a trial.

N Bateman said that all types of transport were being looked at because this plan goes up to 2050. The Council was looking at what infrastructure is required for e-scooters to have them in the borough.

Cllr England felt that with the borough being quite hilly e-scooters should be encouraged in the future, noting that it was important that pedestrians were protected from harm from e-scooters as well.

Cllr Birnie asked what form of transport the 'rapid transport' network was envisaged to be.

N Bateman confirmed that this was work being managed by the County Council and buses were the most likely option but this is currently at the consultation stage.

Cllr England asked for an update on the Nicky line extension.

N Bateman responded that one of the proposals was to make it more than a leisure route, but a feasibility study needed to be carried out first.

N Bateman stated that for private car use, the aim is to encourage local traffic, rather than establish rat runs by through traffic from outside of the borough. Bus gates and breaks in routes are being considered to help prevent this. The aim to reduce private car use also involves mobility hubs. Residents will still be able to have their own private cars, but the attitude to private car usage it is hoped will change in the next 20-30 years. Parking will still be catered for as part of the growth plans and parking standards will continue to apply to planning permissions. But walking and cycling will be encouraged as well as the reduction in the use of the private car. The parking strategy will be the next step in the transport plan and more detail will be presented to the Council . It is expected more will be known in the summer of 2022.

Cllr Birnie noted that the problem for much of the transport plan and the development generally is creating the necessary infrastructure and obtaining funding from sources other than S106 contributions.

N Bateman said that a costed approach for infrastructure was required and it needed to be implemented in a phased manner. An infrastructure study will be carried out that sets out all of the infrastructure requirements that are needed for the Garden Communities Programme. Other Garden Communities have secured large amounts of government funding towards infrastructure but it is important that the project does not wipe out all of the borough's access to other infrastructure funding.

Cllr Anderson spoke about the infrastructure that was needed to support the building plans across the county. The Herts/Essex rapid transport project is open to consultation at the moment. People will use the most convenient mode of transport.

Cllr Birnie supported the idea of an improved bus network but was pessimistic about establishing it because of commercial constraints.

Action

The County Council will present at a future meeting on the transport plan when greater detail is to hand.

The report was noted.

**7 HEMEL HEMPSTEAD TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY AND DESIGN
CODE FOR PARADISE, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD**

S Whelan introduced the report and said that the Hemel Place Strategy is a piece of work aiming to link everything together that is happening around Hemel Hempstead, pulling together the existing strategies into one vision and one place. It is not merely a particular area of planning. S Whelan explained that Appendix 1 links all the visions that have gone through processes so the strategy is not starting from scratch. A key part of the Hemel Place Strategy is linking the Hemel Garden Communities, the Maylands business area, the town centre, the train station etc so it is all one Hemel Hempstead. That is the strategic approach.

S Whelan welcomed feedback on the strategy. The strategy needs careful consideration and lots of wider engagement, The KPMG report noted that Hemel Hempstead could suffer with more people working from home and more people not visiting the town centre leading to a reduction in footfall. So intervention is needed as part of the strategy to prevent this.

The report includes the place shaping approach for the Old Town, which has included a multi discipline team looking at the Old Town and its future. It is a place shaping approach. Some engagement has already taken place on this with the next community engagement in March 2022.

The Hemel Place board membership includes the private, public and third sector. The board will meet every 2 months and the first board meeting took place in November. This meeting included a session from Thinking Place, a consultancy that has been consulting key stakeholders and also reviewing Berkhamsted and Tring.

There was some criticism from members that the wording used by Thinking Place was meaningless.

S Whelan encouraged everyone to read this alongside the KPMG report which also contained the raw data and analysis.

S Whelan said that Theme 2 concerns treasuring the town as a hub for leisure and culture, whilst acknowledging that the arts and culture offer is poor and needs to improve. The Theme 3, 'Shrinking and linking', concerns understanding connectivity points.

Dacorum won a bid from the Department for Levelling Up to pilot Design Codes, resulting in a budget of £50,000 and the appointment of design consultants, Tibbles. The Design Code, as a planning tool, shows how an area could be developed,. Appendix 4 of this report gives some highlights. The final version of the Design Code is due at the end of November and an informal session will be provided for all at that point. Then it will go to scrutiny and cabinet for public consultation before the formal adoption of an SPD.

As a temporary safeguarding expedient, Permitted Development rights have been withdrawn from the town centre area and now planning permission will need to be obtained to convert commercial property into residential use.

Cllr Birnie expressed concern at the lack of back bench Members on the Hemel Place board.

S Whelan confirmed that the board membership included an independent chair, the leaders of the Council and the opposition, the CEO, the executive member from Herts County Council for growth and infrastructure, the Director of Growth from Herts County Council, the Director from the Herts Growth Board, the chairman of Herts LEP, a representative from the Herts CCG, West Herts College, Hemel Garden Communities, Hemel Hempstead Business ambassadors, the CEO of Community Action Dacorum, Homes England, the Department for Levelling Up, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy and a representative from the Dacorum Environmental Forum. St Albans will be in

the loop via the Hemel Garden Communities board. Large businesses have also been invited to participate.

Cllr Birnie welcomed the appointment of an independent chair, who is not only likely to bring forward fresh ideas but who is likely to be better able to manage the disparate views of the members from the many special interest areas represented.

Cllr England asked whether a night economy and concert venue was envisaged as part of the arts and culture theme.

S Whelan explained that the Levelling Up Fund bid to develop housing in the old market square with a cultural hub component was unsuccessful. The Council can apply again in April and if successful the square could be redeveloped to include an arts component, but a new concert venue would be unfeasibly expensive to build and maintain.

Cllr Birnie asked what type of cultural hub had been envisaged.

S Whelan replied that this had not been decided prior to the bid.

Cllr Stevens asked how this strategy was relevant to Berkhamstead or Tring.

S Whelan clarified that this strategy is about the whole of Dacorum, and not just Hemel Hempstead. A meeting is being organised with the Chamber of Commerce to discuss Tring and Berkhamsted's role in this.

Cllr Timmis queried what mitigation was taking place to combat climate change with the housing strategy and whether the new 11,000 houses would mean that there was less need to build on other greenbelt in the borough. AR confirmed that the most recent version of the Local plan was presented in November last year which included comments and officers are reflecting on these comments.

Cllr Birnie was disappointed that the Boxmoor Trust, a major benefactor in the area and responsible for preserving the moors in the centre of Hemel Hempstead for centuries has not been considered at all in this report.

Action:

S Whelan to circulate the list of Hemel Place board members.

Meeting to take place with the Chamber of Commerce.

S Whelan to consider consulting the Boxmoor Trust on the strategy.

The report was noted.

8 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

C Taylor reviewed the work of the Economic Development team over the last 18-24 months and reported that COVID has put a strain on the local economy. The first year of the pandemic saw the team in 'grant payment mode' following a telephone

survey of 700-800 of the borough's local businesses. During the first 12 months of the pandemic the team also looked at supporting specifically the retail sector. Resultant grant schemes were Welcome Back funding and Return to the High Street funding.

DBC's 2 business centres remained open throughout the pandemic and apart from the first 2 months they were fully staffed. The Council continued to charge rent for the centres, so we felt it was important that we were staffing on site and supporting the businesses and having that focal point for the business community. 2 retail projects took place (1) to support people returning to high streets in as safe a way as possible and (2) around promotion and events.

Throughout the pandemic communication was key, around what funding and grants were available. The recovery board opened in March 2021 to identify the priorities for the economy in the area and to formulate a recovery plan for the economy which will be delivered over the short, medium and long term. The Council is in the process of finalising action plans to support that plan and this will move into the delivery phase from 1st January. This involves such partners as the college, the university, the LEP and the chambers of commerce.

The filming sector has mushroomed over the last 6 months. The Council now has a dedicated officer as a single point of contact for the filming locations. DBC is also working with the college and the Elstree Screen Academy to make sure young people can access relevant training and be able to cross over into work experience and access to the filming that is going on. This is part of a wider Hertfordshire piece of work and will hopefully successfully promote Hertfordshire as the Hollywood of the UK.

C Taylor explained that the Council was piloting a project to get social value from Section 106 Agreements which will be a formulaic approach where a certain number of houses or square footage of space equals a number of hours of social value, or social value training. It will oblige the developers to come forward with a skills strategy.

The Council has continued to attract investments from other areas into Dacorum in the last 18 months and the data attached to the report demonstrates that the Council is holding its own financially mainly because the diversity of our economy is one of our strengths.

Cllr Birnie welcomed the report and asked whether a film strategy had been developed.

C Taylor confirmed that filming protocols were already available.

Cllr Taylor queried what support there was for people who wanted to become self-employed following the pandemic. CT explained the partnership with the Herts Growth Hub had been increased with many referrals to them. There is an action plan around skills too as a theme of the recovery. A part-time officer has been appointed as a skills officer as well to help with this. The Council are working with the college and other skills partners preparing the action plan which focuses on self-employment and upskilling.

Cllr Taylor asked if 'Dacorum look no further' is still in place.

C Taylor confirmed it was but it had lost focus with the Garden Communities taking prominence in branding at the moment. CT added there needs to be alignment across all the areas to focus on the One Dacorum brand.

Cllr Stevens explained, looking specifically about filming, that a farm had diversified to provide storage for film makers' equipment and props. Cllr Stevens also added that an issue affecting the economy and housing is raising the level of wages in Dacorum to compete with the salaries of London commuters.

Cllr Birnie asked where the flexi desks referred to in the report were located.

C Taylor confirmed that the flexi desks were the in the Maylands Business Centre.

Cllr Birnie suggested that these should be established in other areas of the Borough.

C Taylor explained that a bid will hopefully be made to the Transforming Towns funding, which is a pot of money that Hertfordshire LEP hold. This would be focussed on the town centre enhance employment opportunities and would include flexible desks for freelancers and entrepreneurs to have virtual business premises and a business starting place, in a co-working environment.

Cllr Wilkie noted that 780 businesses were questioned about how they survived the pandemic and asked whether these businesses would be revisited to ask this again.

C Taylor explained this was taken from the KPMG report which was done after the pandemic but the Council would like to revisit this data. Some projects are being funded by the ARG fund and will go to the recovery board on 8th December.

Cllr Birnie reminded Members that C Taylor was retiring and paid tribute to all of her excellent hard work over many years. The committee applauded this encomium.

Action

C Taylor will resend the filming protocols to all Members.

The report will be amended to say 'West Herts College campus, in Dacorum'.
On page 18 a figure needs to be added in the discussion about the increase of office space.

C Taylor to review the amount of square km of AONB that there is in the borough and update the report if the figure already in there is incorrect.
The reference to the M10 in the report is to be deleted.

The report was noted.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION ENFORCEMENT POLICY

E Walker presented the updated policy, stating that enforcement policy is delivered through letters and notices that are sent to businesses or individuals regarding regulatory function. The enforcement officer informs people how they can expect to

be treated throughout interactions with regulatory officers. Although the vast majority of interventions from within the department result in no enforcement action there is still an unfortunate minority where enforcement action needs to be taken. Enforcement action has safeguards built into it like procedures and rights to fair trials and investigations taken in compliance with criminal evidence when individuals are being questioned.

Cllr Birnie noted the absence of an explanation of the acronym “PAP” in the report.

E Walker explained that PAP meant the Primary Authority Principle, which is where a business would have a link with a particular local authority that they could rely upon for regulatory advice. For example, Tesco has a partnership with Luton Borough Council.

Cllr England asked about enforcement in The Marlowes.

E Walker stated that all enforcement officers (including those in the town centre) have to comply strictly with enforcement policy.

Cllr Beauchamp asked about ‘dark kitchens’ in the borough, i.e. kitchens that operate out of town under the name of a well-known restaurant within the town as a cheap alternative to having a second restaurant and providing only takeaway food.

E Walker was not aware of any such dark kitchens, but people who cook in their own home and sell their food at markets are regulated at home. In this regard the team regularly visit all markets and events in the borough. Market stalls can be enforced in several ways. A home inspection may be made where the bulk of the activity is carried out. Or if the retailer lives in, say, Chesham and comes to a market stall in Dacorum, the Council would liaise with Chiltern District Council to find out regulatory information about those individuals. Alternatively the Council could be contacted by Chiltern District Council to get officers to investigate a particular premises whilst it is operating to collect samples to get a food hygiene rating.

The report was noted.

10 FOOD SERVICE PLAN

R Connolly introduced the report and detailed the inspection framework which complies with the statutory requirements of the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The Council was behind with its inspections of food providers as members of staff had been redeployed to other functions related to the COVID 19 pandemic. RC presented a food service recovery plan designed to rectify this and to get inspections back on track. The FSA has given appropriate and specific timelines to ensure the Council is enabling the people of Dacorum have an informed choice about where they eat and ensuring establishments are complying with legislation. The timelines span from September 2021 to 2024.

Normally, local authorities participate in national and local sampling programmes. Working with the UKHSA they will decide on specific sampling areas to see if risks emerge. The Council has not been able to participate in this due to its lack of resources.

Cllr Beauchamp queried whether there was still an impact of leaving the EU on workload and resources.

R Connolly confirmed that this was still the case. The impact of leaving the EU is still yet to be realised in full. It is thought there could be more requirements for export health certificates in the future as a result of Brexit.

R Connolly stated that the Council had not met its statutory objectives during the pandemic which was why the food service recovery plan was put in place. The Council was confident that with its current resources and the use of consultants, where required, they would be able to clear the backlog of missed inspections.

Cllr Birnie expressed doubts about the timeline for the recovery plan and asked how long inspections took and whether this depends on if the business is compliant or not.

R Connolly replied that a fully compliant business' inspection could take 1 hour, but it could take up to 4 hours where problems became manifest.

Cllr Timmis asked if food banks were inspected.

R Connolly confirmed that food banks are inspected under the same regime as other food businesses.

Cllr Birnie commented that;

- There are a number of typographical and grammatical errors in the report which should be amended.
- A full report on statutory food functions is not required at each meeting in future. The important update for the future is to focus on any changes to the statutory position.
- Future reports should also include more numeric data e.g. average inspection times, which will help to elucidate why more resource is needed to fulfill the department's duties in a timely manner.

- In the light of security issues elsewhere in the government realm, if the names and pictures of staff are not already on the website, then they should be removed from the appendix of the report to protect identities before the report was published.

The report was noted

11 WORK PROGRAMME

Cllr England asked for Air Quality to be added to the programme.

Cllr Birnie agreed to do so, but reminded Members that we still awaited technical amendment by DEFRA of the raw figures from our street monitors, so the item could not yet be scheduled.

The Meeting ended at 10.30 pm