

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

12 JANUARY 2016

Present:

Members:

Councillors: G Adshead
Anderson (Chairman)
Ashbourn
Bateman
E Collins
Fisher
S Hearn
Howard
Ransley
Riddick
C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)

Officers:	David Austin	Assistant Director - Neighbourhood Delivery
	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning and Regeneration
	Chris Taylor	Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration
	Nicola Turvey	Environmental and Sustainability Officer

Also Attendance:

Councillor Christina Brown
Councillor Janice Marshall
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 7.34 pm

1 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 08 December 2015 were confirmed by the members present and signed by the Chairman.

2 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Hicks and Councillor Matthews.

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**

None.

6 **REVIEW OF HEMEL EVOLUTION PROGRAMME**

C Taylor gave a presentation to the Committee regarding the improvement works throughout Hemel Hempstead.

- The Masterplan sets the context of all the work within Hemel Town Centre area and the document sets out the aims of the improvement works and identifies suitable uses within the Town Centre.
- There are seven zones in the Masterplan starting from the Plough roundabout to the Old Town.

Projects completed

- The physical works in the Old Town are now complete but this is not the end of the regeneration. The team are working with retailers to develop an Old Town Partnership.
- There is a new entertainment area and space for markets. The Sunday Market is weekly and currently working with the market provider to hopefully put on a Saturday morning food market in the spring. All these plans are hoping to increase footfall.
- Retailers have expressed an interest in having an ATM installed in the High Street which is being explored by officers.
- There have been four new shops opened in the Old Town. There is a new tea shop which has 5-6 members of staff and are currently looking to take on more. There is a new barber shop with a downstairs gaming room for waiting customers. Also, there is a new coffee shop called "Elbows Off The Table" and the Acorn well-being Centre has relocated into the Old Town after previously moving out of the Old Town.
- There is a draft Old Town Strategy and the economic regeneration of the Old Town will continue into the future.
- The Plough roundabout has got new lighting and improved planting and new street furniture in Heath Park and is seemingly quite well used by the public.

Nearing Completion

- The Town Centre now has play areas, stage and a fountain.
- The Christmas event in the town significantly increased the footfall and produced positive feedback.
- One issue is the provision of electricity as there was a problem with a substation. This should be solved by the end of April and then the new footfall counters and the fountain can be switched on. The providers of the fountain warned that if it was used with the current electricity supply, the warranty would be void.
- The planters that have been installed in Bank Court are moveable so can be moved for events. Also, it was important to have the sightline through to the centre of the town so when the Water Gardens are complete, it will be a lovely avenue into the centre with the fountain.
- The new Bus Interchange opened on 21st December. There are now bus stops into and around Bridge Street and the Marlowes. New shelters have been installed with real time information on bus times. Arriva have a new kiosk for tickets and toilets have been installed. There are plans to turn the old bus station in Market Square to a leisure scheme which will increase the evening footfall.
- The new Bus Interchange has also finished under budget by quite a substantial amount. There was a worry that there was not going to be enough room for the buses to manoeuvre but the feedback is that there is plenty of room and is working quite well.
- The Water Gardens work has started to turn it back to what it was when originally installed. The silt has been dredged from the river and will be moved in the next few weeks and work on the bridges and community building will begin. It is hoped that in the spring there will be some positive improvements.
- It is hoped that the works will be finished in September with a launch event. The Heritage lottery fund has funded two thirds of this project.
- The Forum is currently about two weeks behind schedule but they are catching up quickly. Soon the top concentrate will be installed in the next few weeks. The building should be finished in October and staff will move over in January 2017.
- The wrap around housing will be provided by RG Carters and Endurance Estates who are currently in discussions on the marketing detail for delivery.
- The site of the Magistrates Court and the Health Centre has been obtained so this land can be used as part of this site.
- The Health Centre has relocated in the Gazette offices opposite the Civic Centre and there are active discussions with the police about them potentially developing the old Civic Centre site to acquire their current land site.
- The Maylands Urban Realm will improve the quality of public areas in the Maylands Estate. Paths will be widened and flower beds planted. This contract has been offered and they should be on-site February.

Councillor Ashbourn asked if there will be any planting in the Water Gardens after the silt has been redistributed.

C Taylor said there are plans for a flower garden area opposite Bank Court. However, the original design was quite urban.

Councillor Anderson referred to the historical picture in C Taylor's presentation and pointed out that alongside Waterhouse Street there are no trees on the verge so hopefully this will allow grass to grow as it is used to be overrun by bird excrement.

C Taylor said wild fowl management was part of the project.

Councillor G Adshead said that when this plan was first being developed, there were plans to install electric signs to link with phones.

C Taylor said they are looking into a digital High Street and Hemel Hempstead has been put forward as a pilot for a government scheme to identify ways of enhancing the shopping experience.

Councillor S Hearn questioned whether the soil from the river had been analysed before it was to be redistributed.

C Taylor said that this has been done. They were expecting all of the soil to be contaminated but the results were better than expected. Some is safe to reuse.

J Doe said that the worry was that the waste may have to have been classified as specialist waste which would have had an extra cost to dispose of. As this is not the case, it will be redistributed to farmers.

Councillor Ransley said that a local Tring company have developed the 'My Town' app. People can download it on their phones and when they walk down the High Street, it alerts the users to daily offers in the shops.

Councillor Fisher asked the timescale for the Market Square redevelopment and what will it be used for in the meantime?

C Taylor said that it is hoped that the old office, Indian restaurant and the toilets will be demolished and prices are currently being submitted. However, this is unlikely to start in the next two years. In the meantime, the building contractors will leave and remove their equipment. There have been enquiries from car salesmen and a go-kart operator to use the space. There needs to be a balance between generating income and the cost of business rates.

Councillor G Adshead raised an issue regarding the new LED screen. He stated that some of the slides hang over the edge and the text does not fit on the screen. Also, Councillor G Adshead has noticed that sometimes the Bus Interchange signs say 'information pending'.

C Taylor stated that she was not aware of any issue with the bus timetables but she will look into this. With regards to the LED screen, they are working with a contractor to take over the screen and run it properly. At the moment, she believes it is a formatting issue and this will be resolved in time.

Councillor Anderson questioned if there were any issues over chewing gum in the new Tow Centre.

C Taylor said no more than usual. In the Old town, a machine was sampled to remove chewing gum but it took a long time. In the long term, an educational programme may have to be used to reduce chewing gum ruining the new Town Centre.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe asked if community payback could be used to clear it?

C Taylor said it may be difficult due to the specialist equipment needed and the chemicals used to remove it so there may be insurance issues. However, it is something that could be looked into.

Councillor G Sutton said the three main events since the Town Centre had been redeveloped had all been great successes and the footfall increased significantly. This would not have happened without the excellent work from Chris and her team.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

7 LOCAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK REVIEW

J Doe introduced the report to the Committee to give a summary of the Local Planning Framework and what has been achieved and what is still to come.

- Section 1 of the report is a reminder of what makes up the Local Planning Framework and it comprises a portfolio of documents. The Core Strategy was adopted at Full Council in 2013 setting the strategic context of development in the whole of Dacorum. The next major piece of work referred to in the report is Site Allocations which goes to public examination in the spring.
- Paragraph 1.7 refers to the progress on development. 411 units have been completed during the business year. J Doe drew the Committee's attention to the 2-3 year delivery figure which is lower than the target figure of 430 dwellings per annum. This will vary over the lifetime of the plan and it is forecast that the delivery rate will rise but this is a figure that needs to be kept an eye on. Most of the delivery is done through the private sector although the Council house building programme will contribute to this level.
- The supply of land for housing is good at a 5.9 year supply. The government requires a five year supply and if a local authority dips below this figure, developers seeking permission may have a case for approval due to an inadequate supply of land.
- 72% of dwellings were completed on previously developed land, otherwise known as brownfield sites which is better than previous years. The level is not

as high in the 1990's and 2000's where we were hitting over 90% - the Kodak tower was redeveloped as well as the Apsley Mills project which contributed to this high figure.

- There is a healthy supply of affordable homes coming through the system.
- The site allocations development plan document which sets out the detailed requirements that the Council puts on developers to deliver out the sites it has identified for building on. It refers to the six allocated sites – LA1 through to LA6 but it also refers to a number of locations within the urban envelope than aren't in the Green Belt. There have been changes in government policy which has meant some changes were needed so this has pushed the project back a little. A report went to Cabinet on 15th December and going to Council with a recommendation to approve on 20th January and the examination by the planning inspector is expected to take place in May.
- This is backed up by a series of masterplans have been pushed on the six allocated sites. The Council has worked with the land owners and developers to set further detail. The Planning Advisory Service has latched on to Dacorum for good practice and features as good practice in a national case study.
- A new Local Plan for Dacorum is currently in progress and this will develop throughout this year. It is likely as part of this work there will be a series of new development management policies for considering development. This will include policies on design, landscape, space – things that the Development Control Committee use frequently. The area action plan for East Hemel Hempstead is broadly the Maylands area but has the potential to move across the district boundary into the St Albans area. The significance of this is that St Albans have just last week published their draft Local Plan for consultation. One of the key proposals of that plan is to identify land between the edge of Hemel Hempstead and the M1 for substantial new developments. The Area Action Plan would look at how that area is developed more comprehensively. Discussions have taken place at officer level and between the Portfolio Holders.

J Doe asked for feedback from the Committee about how they would like to be involved in the development of a Local Plan. In the past, a task and finish group has been set up with a handful of members to scrutinise policy which will then feedback to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Anderson highlighted that it would be useful to look at the "The Plan" framework and possibly change the name to avoid future confusion and differentiate between plans.

J Doe admitted that the terminology could be confusing and there has been renaming due to the present government policy. It is down to local discretion regarding the name. Cabinet have agreed on "Single Local Plan".

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe referred to paragraph 1.15 and said there was no mention of the infrastructure that would be required if 2,500 homes were built in the area.

Also, there is a duty to cooperate and under a new Local Plan there could be a possible conflict with those members who sit on Development Control, so can we have some guidelines now?

J Doe said that very little has been able to be said on the Area Action Plan because it has been constrained to the decisions by St Albans City and District Council. The decision that has been published now allows for discussions to take place and things can move forward. In terms of the involvement of members of Development Control Committee, J Doe said he would need to take advice from the Monitoring Officer regarding the Task and Finish group and its membership.

Councillor Anderson said that he felt the Committee needed more information before making a decision on membership.

C Taylor said with regard to infrastructure that there has been work on a Maylands Growth Corridor. It has been funded by the LEP and it has been looking at the expected growth of that area and what infrastructure is needed to cope with that growth. The project is well developed with solutions including new road layouts and has been consulted on with the business community. Rough estimates of costs are around £70 million to deliver this and this work has been feeding into the Enterprise Zone application.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe said she was unaware of these plans as a Ward Councillor and requested a briefing for herself and the other Ward Councillor R Sutton.

Councillor G Adshead seconded Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe's statement and asked about the intentions of St Albans given that this development would have a greater impact on Hemel Hempstead than it would St Albans. Also, is that not contaminated land so will the development be feasible?

J Doe said with relation to the impact on the town, this was a discussion that himself and Councillor G Sutton needed to have with St Albans. Essentially, it is an extension of Hemel Hempstead but falls under St Albans boundary. He had no direct information regarding the land but was under the impression it was mainly farm land.

Councillor Ashbourn stated that it was easy for an emphasis on the provision of housing but has there been enough thought regarding the longer-term impact with relation to the environment, provision of services and quality of life. Eventually, there will be practical limitations when developing large areas.

J Doe said every Council must plan for sustainable development with aspects like energy efficiency and a reduction in the need for travel.

Councillor S Hearn asked if there was any consideration to the influence on judgement this may have on other towns to provide homes.

J Doe said that the 2,500 new homes that St Albans are planning will contribute to their numbers. However, that is a conversation that will happen to see if some of

those homes will contribute to Dacorum's figures. There are not too many examples of Council's sharing numbers but is aware that Luton Council has as their Town Centre is surrounded by rural Central Bedfordshire land.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report and requested the set-up of a Task and Finish group pending the decision on membership.

See Appendix A

8 TWO WATERS REGENERATION FRAMEWORK

J Doe gave a presentation to the Committee to brief members of work on the Two Waters Regeneration framework.

- There is a growing need within the borough to accommodate development. Two thirds of borough is surrounded and constrained by Green Belt land so important to look elsewhere.
- In 2014, a planning application was submitted out of the blue for an extensive 16 storey development. It went to Development Control Committee in September 2014 and the outline application was granted.
- There is a contrast within Two Waters between intensively developed area and vast open space.
- Creating a sense of place involves: street and spaces, access and movement, form and detail and use and activities.
- The development corridor is the key area for future development especially on Two Waters Road with the car dealerships and B&Q.
- Hemel Station's facilities are poor for a town of Hemel Hempstead's size. London Midland have issues with tunnel capacity and if Crossrail extends through the borough, how will the area respond?
- Apsley station is smaller than Hemel Hempstead but there is potential for housing development.
- Apsley Marina has been a huge success and good example of developing previously commercial land. Potential to be a model for other sites.
- One issue that has been raised is the access to recreational land. The Moor has wide open spaces but the facilities to park are sparse. Therefore, people park on the road to run and this causes wider problems.
- The Canal is a key location for developers whose customers desire a waterside location.
- High density does not necessarily mean high rise, for example, the flats on London Road.

- The outline consent for the Symbio, zero carbon development has been granted and the full application is soon to be presented to the Development Control Committee.
- There needs to be commissioning work done on the access and movement throughout Apsley especially the A41 Junction which is often heavily congested.

Councillor Anderson spoke to members on the Development Control Committee and asked them to be careful expressing an opinion and leave it to other members as an applicant could challenge a decision if they feel a member has already prejudged.

Councillor G Adshead thanked J Doe for a good presentation and said he liked the look of the new contemporary buildings in this area. Have you any ideas on the timescales of Two Waters development?

J Doe said that the Two Waters area is different from the Town Centre. The Council has no land ownership in the area and therefore the Council is setting the context for the private sector. If the Symbio development is granted planning permission then they hope to start building as soon as possible. All planning permission has a five year lifespan before it is invalid.

Councillor G Adshead asked if there was anything the Council could do regarding the car wash/sales on the Plough Roundabout.

J Doe said the site had been acquired for development by the Council to build new social housing however, this did not happen. There is now a tenant on site paying income to DBC.

Councillor Anderson raised the issue of traffic through Apsley. He mentioned that he is no longer able to drive through Apsley High Street to reach Hemel Hempstead and this is not just at peak times. Apsley High Street is one of three areas in the borough that has chronic air quality. The roads are impossible to widen without knocking down houses. It is advised that the impact of development is thought out thoroughly

J Doe stated that Cabinet have not decided on numbers but have just agreed a framework and he accepts the concerns about the High Street.

Councillor Anderson said that Herts Highways undertook a traffic survey which coincided with the M1 and M25 closures. This is not a rare occurrence and is a serious concern.

Councillor G Sutton agreed with Councillor Anderson and the road situation is critical. He said that the problem can be isolated to the turning onto Durrants Hill. It is important to look seriously at Two Waters as it is the second gateway into the town. The railway station is old fashioned and needs to be improved for a large town. It is key to focus on quality and not quantity.

Councillor Howard felt she believed that residents had not been consulted or involved in the study. Apsley Lock has meant the roads and parking are impossible. The

shops in the middle of the High Street are losing business because of the one way street and the 20 minute waiting time.

Councillor Ashbourn endorsed Councillor G Sutton's view about quality over quantity.

Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe advised members to visit Hatfield's train station if they are in the area. She said it was an amazing and appropriate development for the town. More attention should be paid to quality of design and materials used.

Councillor G Adshead said that maybe by improving the public transport links through Apsley, this may decrease car use.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

9 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

N Turvey presented to the committee on the Environmental Management System and the ISO14001:2004.

- Benefits of the ISO14001:2014 include: legal compliance, traceability and transparency, accountability and accessibility to records, uniformity in approach, collaboration between departments, continual improvement and internationally recognised standard.
- The Council has 13 sites covered by the ISO. These include: the civic centres, the cemeteries, adventure playgrounds and Cupid Green.
- There are seven volunteer internal auditors who look after two sites each. They audit these every six to nine months depending on the time they have as they are volunteers.
- Not every Council has an ISO so this is a great achievement.
- Data loggers have been purchased for the final seven sites which allows access to hourly/daily/weekly/monthly profile to identify abnormal flow or water leaks.
- N Turvey referred to the graphs in the presentation and said that Berkhamsted Civic Centre had a continual flow throughout January and February.
- Tring Cemetery is due to have a leak repaired in February and this should save 80% of the water already flowing.
- Hertfordshire University students came to the Civic Centre for two days and instructed a waste survey. They found that of the waste that goes to landfill, only 4% of this really needs to. Therefore it is important to push up the recycling rate from inside the Council. This can be done through education, behavioural change and more accessible facilities.

- The electricity use in adventure playgrounds is high because they only have two utilities provided to them – electricity and water. Therefore, the playgrounds are heated with electricity. Electricity costs 12p Kwh compared to gas at 2.5p Kwh.
- The gas use is high in the Civic Centre through the winter months. It is turned off in April and turned on again in September. Also, the water is heated by electricity at the Civic Centre.
- There are little controls in the Civic Centre for water mainly because there is no point investing when the building will be out of use next year.
- Adeyfield adventure playground had high water usage in March 2015 because there was a break in and an outside tap was damaged meaning water was flowing out.
- Chaulden adventure playground has an undetected leak which cannot be found.

Councillor G Adshead had asked why there was such a high electricity usage at the Civic Centre in October.

N Turvey replied that there was demolition works taking place on site and the tools on site were powered by the Civic Centre's electricity.

Councillor S Hearn said that small savings in several locations culminates in big savings for the Council.

Councillor Anderson questioned the financial benchmark of the project.

N Turvey said the urinal control in 13 sites has made a saving of just under £2,000 per site.

Councillor Anderson said it would be useful to quantify all savings and then asked if the leak in Gadebridge Park was detected.

N Turvey said it was a urinal control failure in Centre in the Park.

Councillor Marshall thanked the Committee for their interest in this topic and said it was important to improve and regulate.

Councillor G Adshead asked if N Turvey had any idea of the financial savings moving into the Forum.

N Turvey said she was unsure but would be monitoring and comparing figures.

J Doe said the estimated savings would be approximately £300,000 a year.

Outcome

The Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

10 **WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16**

Councillor S Hearn requested an item on the work programme to look at LA5 and traveller sites.

J Doe said this could be included on the March agenda.

11 **APPENDIX A**

Item 7 – Local Planning Framework Review

One aspect of the report was whether a Task and Finish Group should be set up to assist in the development of the new Single Local Plan for the Borough. At the meeting it was questioned whether it was appropriate for Members of the Committee who also have Membership of the Development Control Committee to be part of any such Task and Finish Group. As agreed at the meeting, I have consulted with Steve Baker, the Council's Monitoring Officer, who has advised there should be no conflict of interests arising in the future between Members' respective roles in Overview and Scrutiny and Development Control.

Following this, with the agreement of Cllr Anderson, Chair of the Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny, interest in sitting on a new Task and Finish Group from Committee Members is now invited. Membership is at the discretion of the Programming Panel which consists of the Political Group Leaders. The Task and Finish Group shall consist of at least six Members and should be politically balanced. The Programming Panel will consider expressions of interest and make its decision on composition as soon as possible.

If you wish to sit on the new Local Plan Task and Finish Group, please advise Katie Mogan in Member Support by **12 noon Monday 18th January 2016**.

The Meeting ended at 9.46 pm