

MINUTES

STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

5 JULY 2023

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Anderson
Birnie
Bromham
Deacon (Vice-
Chairman)
Gale
Hobson (Chairman)
Hobson
Mitchell
Patterson
Pringle
Santamaria
Timmis
Walker
Wilkie
C Wyatt-Lowe

Officers: Aidan Wilkie Strategic Director, People and
transformation

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at Time Not Specified

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting were formally approved as an accurate record.

Cllr Birnie referred to the action list on page 18 of the pack and suggested that there were duplicated headings in the table. Cllr Birnie queried what a CSU subscription is. It was noted that the officer was not present and Cllr Birnie agreed to contact him by email. The Chair asked that queries be submitted to LFowell.

LFowell advised that an update has been circulated following the circulation of the action points.

The Chair suggested that other action points could be addressed during the meeting.

Cllr Timmis referred to the action on affordable housing and noted that it states they are checked and made available by May or June. Cllr Timmis asked if this meant in 2023 and whether they are therefore available. It was confirmed that this is not yet available and that it would be followed up next week

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that Cllr Deacon was made Chair of Avid this week

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that Cllr Deacon was made Chair of Avid this week

4 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation. However, William Wyatt-Lowe was viewing online on behalf of the Hemel Place Board.

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

None

6 ACTION POINTS

As covered under item 1

7 HEMEL TOWN CENTRE VISION

SWhelan gave a short presentation on the Hemel Hempstead Town Centre Vision with an overview of the Hemel Place Board, which advocates for Hemel Hempstead and considers the investment opportunities to get the best out of all interventions that are operating and horizon scanning going forward. The strategy will bring together current programmes and consider the town centre as a first step with short, medium and longer-term interventions, and the strategy looks to grow relationships across Hemel Hempstead and integrate with communities and businesses. A consultation took place at the start of the work and focused on the idea of growing a fresh new future for Hemel Hempstead with themes focusing on enterprise, connections and wellbeing. The story was launched in July 2022 and is now part of the vision being presented.

The town centre vision links all the interventions taking place and considers how the town centre needs these interventions to support its growth. The vision is an overarching view of the aims and ambition and is not a delivery plan, it is aimed towards investors and how to increase the profile of Hemel Hempstead. Throughout previous planning, Hemel Hempstead has fallen below the radar in terms of investment. The drivers for change include reduced footfall, as well as considering how people now use town centre spaces and how to mitigate climate change. The five priorities for the town centre are (1) focus on Bank Court as the heart of the town centre, (2) improve east-west connections, (3) reimagining Waterhouse Street, (4)

reconnecting the old and new towns and (5) Hemel Imaginarium, which looks at revitalising the town centre in the short-term.

The natural environment is a strong asset of the town centre. Opportunity sites are critical and a flexible approach will be taken. A soft-launch of the vision was given at UKREiiF and was positively received.

Cllr Pringle asked how flexible and future-proof the vision is, noting that the work started a few years ago and that they are only reflecting on the long-term change catalysed by the pandemic. Cllr Pringle queried if they should look at the plan in terms of future-proofing and lifestyle changes are still being observed so the vision needs to be innovative and flexible.

Commenting on the post-pandemic world, SWhelan advised that this has been considered with economic development and that feedback from surveys is that businesses are still learning, such as around hybrid working and spaces are required. SWhelan stated that research suggests that, by 2030, much of the office space will be for co-working. On land uses, SWhelan advised that the plan takes the opportunity sites and is open to what the land uses could be, and the vision is firmer on Marlowes and the main retail hub. SWhelan suggested that they not pause as there could be an unknown amount of delay and the vision has been kept open enough. SWhelan noted the feedback from the community regarding the access to nature and that this will be a key area of focus.

Cllr Birnie commended the report and asked how many respondents are represented in charts, noting that this is not included within the report. Cllr Birnie referred to page 43, appendix 1, noting that this includes the numbers of respondents for each category and only added up to 430. Cllr Birnie queried if they had only taken on the views of 430 people to make their assumptions.

SWhelan confirmed that 430 survey responses were taken forward to analyse and that this was felt to be a good response. On the assumptions for the vision, SWhelan advised that these did not solely come from community consultations and are also from discussions with investors and considerations about opportunities for the town centre following the master plan 10 years ago.

DSoutham agreed with the need for flexibility within the document and why the plan remains at a high level. DSoutham stated that they need to be able to respond to market potential and other opportunities at any given time. On the consultation, DSoutham suggested that the level of engagement is relatively high for this stage in the process and that there will be further engagement as the delivery plans evolve.

Cllr Birnie suggested that 430 respondents out of a population of around 80,000 is not a respectable sample. Cllr Birnie agreed that the views of potential investors should be carried forward but that the electorate also needs to be brought forward, stating that officers may be reinforcing their own views without reference to the people that live in the area. Cllr Birnie referred to the strapline 'Hemel is a family of welcoming neighbourhoods' and suggested that this is not what the respondents believe, noting that on page 42, appendix 1, the pie charts show significant disagreements with this view. Cllr Birnie advised that he was not surprised by this response and that residents in his ward are completely neglected where the shopping centre has been described to him as 'like something left over from East

Germany during the Soviet era' where elderly people are afraid to go out later in the evening. Cllr Birnie commented that these areas need to be addressed before considering the town centre.

The Chair commented that her understanding of the document is that it is to encourage investors and to promote the area, though the focus of the work also needs to be on what they are doing for their own community to improve things for residents, not just for investors.

JDoe advised that the consultation was carried out via a number of platforms, including a residents' group, business group and voluntary sector group, as well as the use of the Commonplace platform, an interactive mapping tool where residents can leave comments. JDoe explained that whilst the plan isn't exclusively for the investment community, they are a strong recipient and that they will not see real change in the town centre before investment is brought in. JDoe advised that the Council needs to be clear on what it expects to see and also needs a convincing narrative to bring this investment in. JDoe commented that the Council does not own much property in the town centre and that they are therefore working with the investment and development communities to shape the use of properties. JDoe noted that when consultants visited the town centre, they remarked on how green the area is and that this should be highlighted through the strapline.

Regarding neighbourhood centres, JDoe confirmed that these have not been forgotten and that the Hemel Spatial Vision document references neighbourhood centres across Hemel Hempstead. JDoe advised that DSoutham and SWhelan have been asked to look at this as part of the strategy and more information will come.

Cllr Birnie commented that the charts and the report contradict themselves. The Chair agreed with Cllr Birnie's comments and suggested they continue to monitor if they can address the tension between the promotional advertising and the reality.

Cllr Walker advised that he worked as a commercial agent in Hemel Hempstead for 20 years and that the town centre has changed beyond recognition. It was previously a business town and this has now gone. Cllr Walker suggested that the best views for office buildings are in Waterhouse Street looking over the park area, though it is different from the other side of the building. Cllr Walker commented on the large amount of concrete running through the centre of town and queried how many people will walk from the new town and old town, stating that it is too far and they are different entities. Cllr Walker stated that he was Chair of the BID and suggested that they use the data collected by BID. Cllr Walker noted that there is currently no night-time economy and there is no reason to come into the town centre at night, stating that places such as the bowling alley and cinema were taken out.

The Chair noted that a number of new restaurants are now opening in the area.

Cllr Walker suggested that the main issue for Hemel town centre is where the train station is situated.

Cllr Deacon commented that the documents do not focus on the amount of green space as much as they could.

Cllr Pringle responded to concerns raised by Cllr Birnie and suggested that the vision is part of a wider malaise, stating that residents and businesses can't just be viewed separately. Cllr Pringle voiced her concerns around the democratic deficit with a sense of alienation and that people feel they are not being consulted, advising that they therefore need to look at creating a new narrative and bringing people along with them. Cllr Pringle stated that the vision needs to be inclusive and should be based on serving residents.

Cllr Gale commented on the Hemel Vision Board and asked how board representation is decided. SWhelan advised that a report from April 2021 seeks permission to start Hemel Place work and to set up a board. SWhelan confirmed that they have looked at best practice from elsewhere and that feedback suggests there should be diversity from the public and private sectors as well as the community. SWhelan confirmed that she could circulate the terms of reference, noting that companies such as CAE have been brought onto the board as they are so proactively invested and that the third sector is also well represented. SWhelan suggested that the board composition is productive but that there are no set rules and any feedback on this would be welcomed.

Cllr Gale asked for a definition of the third sector. It was confirmed that this relates to charities.

Cllr Gale referred to the picture of how Bank Court could look and asked who decides on these and who owns the land. SWhelan advised that this is a vision. The Chair noted that it provides investors with an idea of how the area could look. SWhelan confirmed that the next step will be to engage with landowners

Cllr Gale commented that whilst it is a high-level vision, they also need to ensure they have a say on what happens in the town. Cllr Gale queried how the image of Bank Court was come up with. SWhelan explained that this was part of the Levelling Up Fund proposals with a bid put forward to central government for £10m and if they had been successful they would have gone through public consultation to seek the community's views on the vision.

A councillor commented that some of the Bank Court photos are at least two years out of date. It was also noted that Kodak is spelt incorrectly in the plan.

Cllr Anderson voiced his disagreement with the portrayal that the vision is brand new. Cllr Wilkie stated that this was an inappropriate comment at a scrutiny committee. The Chair agreed with Cllr Wilkie, noting that the councillor is free to voice his opinion but that the plan was not being presented as something that has been created in the last two months.

Cllr Anderson welcomed the strategy and stated that his support comes with two caveats that they monitor trying to attract leisure use in the centre and to ensure that external factors don't harm what the plan is looking to achieve.

Cllr Patterson referred to UKREiiF and asked for further information on how this was seen as a success. SWhelan advised that the success of the event was around increasing the profile of Hemel Hempstead and having a stand presence allowed for passing trade with detailed conversations with investors from Hong Kong and investors who are focused on London but are now looking at tertiary towns around

the M25. SWhelan advised that the approach from a Hertfordshire wide point of view was very positive with the three investment towns across Hertfordshire being Stevenage, Watford and Hemel Hempstead, and that Hertfordshire as a whole county is well placed to capitalise on the filming industry, for example. SWhelan noted the importance of having a relationship with the Hertfordshire LEP and being willing to engage as a local authority. For 2024, Hertfordshire LEP would like to lead the expo of Hertfordshire and are looking at broader branding without losing the message of the three main investment towns. This will be seen as a wider benefit and will be a benefit to put in to get funding to increase their profile further. SWhelan advised around 50 contacts were made and are being followed up with one-to-one meetings and a number of contacts were made with consultants or agents, as well as networking contacts with other public sectors. SWhelan advised that they will likely take up a more senior cohort for 2024 and look to have one-to-one meetings as well as have a stand presence to increase their profile.

DSoutham commented on Hemel Place branding and that this significantly helped attract people to the stand at UKREiiF. DSoutham stated that the branding as well as the ambitions and aims of the vision were well received and that they are still following up on the 50 contacts made with further contacts that have been made since. DSoutham noted that they had received a lot of positive feedback, including from people who have lived in the area and know the town centre well.

Cllr Mitchell asked what percentage of the public they would hope to engage with, agreeing that more engagement is needed and that there needs to be greater community regeneration. Cllr Mitchell commented that they live in a neglected and socially deprived area and acknowledged that they need to attract investment to address this. Cllr Mitchell described Hemel Hempstead as a 'patchwork quilt', stating that there is a distinct lack of cohesion and that the positive work done in the Old Town and Water Gardens now needs to be replicated in other areas.

Cllr Gale referred to Cllr Mitchell's comments regarding a lack of cohesion, noting that the report highlights that 58% of respondents have a negative view of interaction between communities and that the town has poor nightlife with underdeveloped evening and leisure economies that fails to make the most of its natural assets. Cllr Gale then referred to page 123 of the report, noting the reference to the oversupply of retail and weak offering of sports, culture and restaurant facilities with Hemel Hempstead being the third weakest of 109 town centres. Cllr Gale supported Cllr Tindall's vision to transform Hemel Hempstead town centre into a thriving and busy leisure and cultural quarter with a mix of use and activities, stating that he also states that with fewer people coming into the town centre to work and shop, these locations need an alternative to attract locals and visitors from further afield.

Cllr Gale next looked to the aims regarding civic pride, the town centre, culture and leisure, and asked if there is any place for a sustainable community-based cultural centre in the new plan. Cllr Gale noted the possible replacement for the pavilion, stating that it was once a cultural centre, and suggested that a community arts organisation could provide cohesion. Cllr Gale advised that they are unusual in being a major town without a central arts venue, noting that the Hemel Vision Board is fairly commerce driven, and asked how much arts and culture are represented on the board.

The Chair referred to Dunstable, noting that they have an arts centre and drama school.

SWhelan responded to the earlier query regarding the consultation, noting that the document is not community-led and that there may be a degree of consultation fatigue with a consultation regarding the Old Town 4 months previously as well as a consultation piece around the Paradise Design Code area. SWhelan confirmed that there will be further community engagement and that this would be required if they attracted significant funding.

SWhelan noted the importance of arts and culture, stating that the Dacorum Creatives came from the Hertfordshire Year of Culture in 2020 and there is a live creative culture. The area's assets are strong in nature and biodiversity. SWhelan suggested that, as they bring communities closer and work with them in a more integrated way that they may find other themes, such as music, but they need to be authentic to what their groups currently are, which are currently arts and culture and biodiversity. As this is nurtured and as the Council looks outward to Tring that has strong assets, they can build relationships across the whole borough. SWhelan confirmed that they did consider a large bid to government for a cultural venue in the market square but that this was pushed back and therefore a priority in the delivery plan will be Hemel Imaginarium, which meanwhile uses a programme with good funding behind it from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Most of this will be held outside to allow culture and arts outside, and there may also be the taking over of vacant shops. SWhelan reassured members that arts and culture is a priority.

The Chair reminded officers of the need to bring the community along with them.

Cllr Pringle commented on the need to understand Hemel's identity and the importance of being authentic. Cllr Pringle acknowledged the borough's diverse communities and that this can be brought together through music. Cllr Pringle suggested that they need to be the catalyst for investment and make the most of the assets it already has, including the energy, enthusiasm and talent of local people, which will naturally help express the identity of people. Cllr Pringle suggested that they take the consultation to the people and better understand them, noting the impact they could see if they let people lead this with the oversight of the Council, and suggested that they look at a festival in the Water Gardens.

Cllr Wyatt-Lowe commented on the issues with the pavilion and that the decision was taken to demolish the pavilion with the aspiration to rebuild it. Cllr Wyatt-Lowe advised that whilst there isn't a formal arts centre, there is a strong cultural heritage in Hemel Hempstead and Dacorum that deserves an outlet. In 2008, the Council was in partnership with Thornfield and there was a well-developed plan for a theatre in the market square that would act as a multi-purpose centre, but the plan collapsed with the financial crash. Cllr Wyatt-Lowe noted that revenue is required to ensure the survival of venues.

Cllr Mitchell suggested that they should look to use open spaces and referred to Pub in the Park in St Albans and recommended that they look at how they use Gadebridge Park. Cllr Mitchell noted that the recent festivals in the park had been a success and that there is an appetite for music and the arts in Hemel Hempstead. The Chair suggested that the event was noisy for local residents.

Cllr Anderson advised that the pavilion cost the Council £200k to keep the building open every year and advised that it folded as the area can't compete with London. Cllr Anderson commented that many areas around London don't have arts venues because of this.

Cllr Anderson referred to previous place making consultations for Hemel Hempstead and stated that a performing arts venue has appeared low in the list of priorities with green, open spaces coming out as the top priority. Cllr Anderson acknowledged the wish for a performing arts venue but noted that it is not a high priority for constituents. Cllr Anderson commented that any performing arts venue will need to be viable. The Chair added that the space would need to be multi-use.

The Chair acknowledged the comments regarding the pavilion and having an arts space.

Cllr Walker commented on the arts centre in Aylesbury and noted the financial burden this is, which becomes more challenging as the building becomes older.

Cllr Walker advised that the town centre is primarily a retail high street and queried what types of investors they are looking for. Cllr Walker commented that the area would not necessarily attract high earners and suggested that the leisure plans for the Marlowes would bring a huge benefit to the town.

Cllr Gale commented on the brochure for Hemel Garden Communities, noting the image of what the public space will look like and queried the status of the public areas in these communities, whether these will be truly public or will be made private. The Chair advised that this was outside the scope of the discussion and that this could be addressed when looking at Hemel Garden Communities. SWhelan confirmed that the decision on whether the roads will be council-owned or private is yet to be made, and whilst the main highways are likely to be adopted, they have not yet been granted planning permission.

Cllr Pringle remarked that they are selling a post-pandemic vision of a post-pandemic town within commuting distance from London where they work, live and socialise. With people not commuting into London every day, this will bring the market into Hemel and this needs to be taken into account. Cllr Pringle suggested that what residents would previously have got from London now needs to be brought into the local area. Cllr Pringle commented that they could look for Hemel to become a centre for the arts and that it is an exciting time to focus on this post-pandemic.

The Chair asked the Committee if it felt it had received enough information to understand the Hemel Vision to take to Cabinet.

Cllr Patterson asked what the vision is for Market Square, suggesting that this is an area that requires detailed development.

Cllr Birnie commented that the vision appears to be too prescriptive and officer-driven, stating that it is too far removed from the people of Hemel Hempstead.

The Chair noted the changing demographic in Hemel Hempstead as people are being priced out of London, St Albans and Berkhamsted so are now looking at areas such as Boxmoor and Old Town. The Chair referred to the recent development of

£1m homes on Green End Road and suggested that businesses look at the area to understand the demographic as there may be an incorrect perception of the current demographic.

JDoe confirmed that they would present the demographic data, noting that this is already available to view. The Chair queried how up to date this information is given the number of young professionals that have recently moved to the area.

JDoe thanked the Committee for its feedback and for looking at the vision in such detail. On the vision being officer-led, JDoe stated that the vision was put together by officers, but this is not in the absence of taking soundings from the community at different levels. Regarding the vision being described as too prescriptive, JDoe suggested that this is one of the least prescriptive documents that he has worked on as it is a vision, not a masterplan or planning development brief, and it aims to inspire ideas from the private sector if they are looking to take particular sites on. JDoe noted that they will be discussing regeneration plans with the new long leaseholders at Riverside and that these will be brought to the Council in due course. JDoe advised that as the Council doesn't own much property in the area, many controls will be through town planning, though they can use other tools such as design codes and scrutiny through the Development Management Committee.

JDoe referred to a previous question regarding membership of the Hemel Vision Board, noting that this is the Council's gift. A report went to Cabinet in 2021 that suggested certain groups for inclusion and that this can be expanded.

JDoe noted the feedback regarding arts and culture and raised that, as the place directorate develops over the coming months, they will be appointing a Head of Arts and Culture through the restructuring of DSoutham's area and this head of service will be tasked with driving this creative agenda across Dacorum. This person will have responsibility of the Old Town Hall and how to expand its reach.

JDoe explained that the vision is to help inspire confidence within the private sector and that they are in competition with other areas, so if they aren't confident as a place on what they have to offer then they will be unable to attract investment. JDoe noted that they are openly publishing data, including areas of weakness, and that they are looking to lead communities and businesses to help address these.

The Chair provided a summary, noting the people and those across Dacorum along with the vision. The Chair suggested that the portfolio holder and Cabinet consider whether a community representative be part of the Hemel Vision Board as well as someone who can also represent arts and culture. The Chair commented on the focus around arts and culture, though any actions around this need to be data-driven. The Chair noted that whilst travel was not discussed much by the Committee, they should look at ways to help connect areas, and that there should also be further information provided on regeneration of neighbourhood centres. Looking at further engagement, the Chair suggested that all members receive a briefing on what Hemel Hempstead has to offer to ensure consistency across members.

Cllr Mitchell raised a point regarding youth facilities in the town centre to help prevent anti-social behaviour, which may potentially be on the increase. A councillor commented on the shutting down of Quasar during the pandemic and advised that a bowling alley and other youth facilities would make Hemel Town Centre a more

positive place as young people currently have nothing to do. The Chair agreed, noting that this also links to civil pride.

Cllr Mitchell asked if social media groups are being used to gather feedback. The Chair agreed that this would help engage members.

The Chair noted that any further feedback could be submitted to SWhelan.

8 ANNUAL PLANNING ENFORCEMENT REPORT

PStanley presented the report, noting that specific enforcement cases could be looked at in more detail outside of the meeting. The previous 12 months have seen a number of challenges and successes and PStanley referred to issues within the service with the amount of live cases that remain on their books. Staffing over the last 12 months has been challenging and the principle planning enforcement officer and planning enforcement positions have now been filled. On performance, PStanley noted a downward trend in live enforcement case numbers, which peaked at 620 and are now at around 400, which is due to a declining number of cases being received as well as the work being put in with the 400 Plan with dedicated focus on geographic areas and case types.

PStanley noted the errors under part 3, stating that the intention was to present 1st June 2022 to 31st May 2023 and members were instead pointed to the data contained within the tables. PStanley advised that the key messages within the section remain true with further closures and live cases coming down. Around 25% of cases are closed due to establishing there was no breach to start with, just over 25% are closed as the team has concluded that it would not be expedient to take further action as the case is a minor breach. Around 45% of cases are closed due to the actions of the team, such as securing planning permission or the offender voluntarily resolving the issue.

PStanley referred to the focus on dealing with the most harmful cases and serving of enforcement notices with 19 enforcement notices issued in the first 6 months of this year, compared to 10 in the last year, though this also results in greater appeal work, which requires further resourcing. PStanley advised that this then means there is reduced resource to attend sites regarding new cases and therefore the Principal Planning Enforcement Officer is triaging cases to assess the level of harm and the requirement for an urgent site visit. PStanley explained that the focus is on cases that are the most harmful and that are in danger of becoming immune through the 4- or 10-year rule.

PStanley next looked at the KPIs, noting that this was raised at the last meeting, and also referred to the suggested KPIs from local government. Looking ahead, PStanley explained that they are now looking at the 300 Plan to create a more sustainable caseload for the team and that various measures are being worked on to achieve this. There are upcoming challenges in terms of biodiversity net gain and the expectation that local planning authority enforcement teams will be required to monitor the agreements. PStanley summarised that the team is performing well, that there are cases where they have not acted as timely or completely as they would like, but that the team is working well in terms of driving down live case numbers and taking formal action.

Cllr Pringle acknowledged the need to prioritise cases and noted her concern on how this applied in the public interest. Cllr Pringle commented on concerns regarding retention and development of staff, noting that there is central government funding available for apprenticeships and recommended they look at this to help with both bringing people into the industry and handle the volume of work by having trainees or apprentices filter the work for officers.

PStanley first looked at expediency, noting that they can't create set rules for this as it changes according to the circumstances on the ground and therefore an individual assessment is required. PStanley explained that for breaches they will either invite a retrospective planning application, which can enable a consultation process with the area, or they can serve a formal enforcement notice. PStanley advised that if they refuse to submit a planning application then they will either service an enforcement notice or the file is closed as there are no further options.

Regarding recruitment, PStanley confirmed that they are looking at the areas suggested by Cllr Pringle and that they have had some planning trainees who spent their first 6 weeks with the planning enforcement team, and this will be explored further.

Cllr Santamaria asked what the planning backlog was like pre-Covid and what the realistic final target is. PStanley advised that they receive approximately 500 enforcement cases per year and that it can take years for a case to be resolved. Cases were increasing by approximately 40 cases per year for around 7-8 years and a 250 live caseload for the current team would be the target to enable each officer to have a manageable caseload to undertake first visits and formal action when required.

Cllr Timmis commented that the report does not include getting more resources for the department. Cllr Timmis noted issues around retaining and recruiting staff and suggested that planning enforcement officers being paid less than planning officers should be addressed. Cllr Timmis added that further resources are required to ensure that the team can cope with the current burden of work, particularly given the number of appeals. The Chair suggested that this be discussed with the portfolio holder outside of the meeting and that they come back to the Committee on what can be done regarding resources.

PStanley responded to the query regarding retention, noting that planning officers and planning enforcement officers have received their letter regarding the market forces supplement. This budget was approved by the Council and is being awarded to officers. The Chair queried if this is ongoing or for one year. PStanley advised that all market forces supplements are subject to review and must be reviewed at least every two years.

The Chair agreed that further information in response to Cllr Timmis' comments should be brought back in future. JDoe advised that they have put into the budget a request for a further permanent officer for planning enforcement, though this will be subject to member scrutiny.

Cllr Birnie congratulated PStanley and his team, noting that the team is performing better than any other council in Hertfordshire in terms of enforcement, as stated in paragraph 48 of the report.

Cllr Birnie referred to table 3 in the report and queried the difference between adverts and agent's boards, noting that they are a form of advertising. Cllr Birnie also asked what an S215 notice is. Cllr Birnie suggested that it would be helpful if the officer could address what are considered the most egregious forms of behaviour that require the team's attention, suggesting that some attention should be paid to the amount of people who suffer from the breach.

Regarding the difference between estate agent boards and adverts, PStanley advised that in 2022 no estate agent board cases were created, which is likely to be because they were given the advert suffix and that they have differentiated between them in the past. On S215, PStanley explained that this is part of the Town and Country Planning Act that deals with a lack of proper maintenance of land or buildings and action can be taken with a S215 notice. On which activities the planning enforcement team should focus on, PStanley confirmed that there is a priority system within the local enforcement plan that divides development into three levels of priority with the top priority being listed buildings and protected trees as well as irreversible damage to areas of outstanding beauty.

The Chair asked if the local enforcement plan could be shared with the Committee. PStanley confirmed that this is available to view on the Council's website.

Cllr Anderson noted the drop in planning applications in the past 3-4 weeks and asked if there is an opportunity for some case officers to be put on secondment to assist with planning enforcement cases. Cllr Anderson commented that it had emerged at a meeting last year that there could be an opportunity for setting up courses at the college to get students interested in planning and suggested that there is a short window of opportunity to get cases down and also train students.

SWhelan advised that she had spoken to the LGA regarding the cohort of 30 apprenticeships and that they would be keen to put themselves forward for this. This will close on 5th September and SWhelan confirmed she would be liaising with the management team on how to take this forward given previous success with 4 officers coming through the apprenticeship levy.

SWhelan commented that she had spoken to Oaklands, West Herts College and University of Hertfordshire following the Hemel Place discussion regarding whether they could have a local town planning course and help get town planners. In taking this forward, the challenge is that University of Hertfordshire is Royal Town Planning Institute accredited and that they are not viable to be able to look at opening another town planning course. SWhelan advised that instead they are focusing on pushing town planning more broadly and this is being picked up by national bodies.

In response to the comment regarding diverting resources and seconding officers, SWhelan advised that the Habitat Regulation Assessment work has distracted a lot of planning officer capacity in terms of legal agreements and has absorbed capacity.

Cllr Birnie acknowledged the pressure that the team is under and asked if they should look to conduct early site visits in all instances to help avoid fewer problems in future and therefore reduce officers' work. PStanley advised that this is where an early site visit is beneficial and that it also allows them to close down cases where there is no breach quickly, and the team are mindful of the council target to carry out

100% of early site visits in time. Due to the absence of having a principal planning enforcement officer for some time, PStanley advised that there was a build up of formal work and this has therefore impacted first site visits. As resources increase, it is hoped that performance will improve.

Cllr Pringle referred to the focus on getting into Year 12 students and suggested that they could also look at post-graduate students wanting to do PhDs and that they could contact local universities, particularly regarding the Chiltern Beechwoods. Post-graduate students may also be interested in a one-year conversion whilst working part time.

PStanley commented that there are an increasing number of university students taking a year out and that they are looking at attracting these students.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair advised that the next meeting will take place in September and will cover reports and is more policy-led. The next meeting is currently empty and members were asked to consider items. The Chair noted she is keen for officers to bring the Local Plan Update as early as possible and that this could possibly be included in the October or December meeting.

It was asked if the question mark could be removed from the Rural Plan.

There being no further business, the meeting was formally closed.

Agreed Actions

- Officer to contact Cllr Birnie regarding table in action points on green waste and duplicated headings and to confirm meaning of CSU subscription (TPugh?)
- To follow up affordable housing information (JDoe)
- To circulate documents regarding Hemel Vision Board (SWhelan)
- To provide demographic data for Hemel Hempstead (JDoe)
- To discuss resources for planning enforcement with portfolio holder and bring back further action to the Committee.
- For question mark to be removed from the Rural Plan (LFowell)

The Meeting ended at Time Not Specified