



Strategic Planning & Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Consultation responses and endorsement of an amended Vision and Objectives for the South West Herts Joint Strategic Plan
Date:	6 September 2023
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Wilkie, Portfolio Holder for Place
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1(a) - South West Herts JSP Consultation Report Part 1: What we did https://www.swhertsplan.com/26615/widgets/75394/documents/45438 • Appendix 1(b) - South West Herts JSP Consultation Report Part 1: What we did (Appendices) https://www.swhertsplan.com/26615/widgets/75394/documents/45441 • Appendix 2(a) - West Herts JSP Consultation Report Part 2: What you said https://www.swhertsplan.com/26615/widgets/75394/documents/45442 • Appendix 2(b) - West Herts JSP Consultation Report Part 2: What you said (Appendices) https://www.swhertsplan.com/26615/widgets/75394/documents/45447 • Appendix 3 - Extract - Recommended changes to the vision and objectives • Appendix 4 - Extract - Schedule of recommended changes to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report • Appendix 5 – Community Impact Assessment
Background papers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulation 18 document 'Realising Our Potential' (September 2022) https://www.swhertsplan.com/foreword • Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (September 2022) https://www.swhertsplan.com/sustainability-appraisal-scoping-report • Topic Papers https://www.swhertsplan.com/key-documents • Statement of Community Involvement https://www.swhertsplan.com/key-documents • Regulation 18 Communications and Engagement Plan https://www.swhertsplan.com/key-documents
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>CIA: Community Impact Assessment</p> <p>DLUHC: Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities</p> <p>EqIA: Equalities Impact Assessment</p> <p>HIA: Health Impact Assessment</p> <p>JSP: Joint Strategic Plan</p> <p>LPA: Local Planning Authority</p> <p>R18: Regulation 18</p> <p>SA: Sustainability Appraisal</p> <p>SAC: Special Area of Conservation</p>

SCI: Statement of Community Involvement
SW Herts: South West Hertfordshire

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Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A clean, safe and enjoyable environment• Building strong and vibrant communities• Ensuring economic growth and prosperity• Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need• Climate and ecological emergency
Wards affected	ALL
Purpose of the report:	To progress a report to Cabinet with the following recommendations: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To provide an overview of responses received to the Regulation 18 'Realising Our Potential' document and associated draft Sustainability Scoping Report; and2. To endorse the amended Vision and Objectives for use in guiding future iterations of the Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) and associated technical work.

Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	<p>To progress a report to Cabinet with the following recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the feedback received on the SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan Regulation 18 consultation (see Appendices 1 and 2); 2. Recommend Cabinet endorse the revised Vision and Objectives for the Plan, incorporating changes recommended as a result of the consultation responses (see Appendix 3); 3. Recommend Cabinet agree the recommended changes to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (see Appendix 4); and 4. Recommend Cabinet delegate authority to the Strategic Director –Place, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree any non-substantive changes, finalise and publish: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) a document setting out the revised Vision and Objectives; and (b) an updated Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.
Period for post policy/project review:	On-going

1 Introduction/Background:

Role and Scope of the JSP

- 1.1 The South West Hertfordshire authorities (Dacorum Borough Council, St. Albans City and District, Watford Borough Council, Hertsmere Borough Council and Three Rivers District Council, with the support of Hertfordshire County Council) have agreed to work together to produce the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan (JSP). This will provide an integrated strategic planning framework and supporting evidence base to support sustainable growth in the area to 2050.
- 1.2 The JSP will be a statutory planning document, prepared under Section 28 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended). The Plan will identify the overall quantum of housing and economic growth within South West Hertfordshire to be planned for to 2050 and its broad distribution across the area. The plan will identify strategic allocations and priorities, as well as the strategic infrastructure necessary to deliver the spatial strategy.
- 1.3 The JSP will focus on climate resilience, infrastructure delivery, strategic housing and employment. However it will be about more than planning and will help create a framework for investor confidence in SW Herts.
- 1.4 The benefits of a JSP include:
 - Increased potential for unlocking infrastructure investment from Government;

- Creating a bigger canvas to make decisions about future growth;
 - Allowing an infrastructure-led approach; not ‘planning by numbers’; and
 - Enabling a coordinated approach to investment and delivery of infrastructure giving priority to strategic solutions.
- 1.5 All five local planning authorities will retain ‘sovereignty’ over the JSP process, with the plan following essentially the same process as individual Local Plans. It will therefore need approval from each of the partner authorities at each key stage of its preparation and final adoption.

Relationship of the JSP to district Local Plans

- 1.6 Each of the South West Hertfordshire authorities is in the process of updating their individual Local Plans, which currently run to between 2031 and 2038. The JSP will not affect the content of this current round of Local Plans. Rather these Local Plans will help inform the JSP by establishing the medium term planning strategy for the area. The Joint Strategic Plan will then look further ahead in a more co-ordinated way, to 2050, to help provide a longer-term framework for the area. When each authority comes to review their Local Plan again, they will be able to frame those new policies in the context of the jointly developed policies in the Joint Strategic Plan. The next round of Local Plans will also add more detail to the policies of the Joint Strategic Plan and facilitate their delivery. Working in the context of the jointly developed Joint Strategic Plan policies, these more detailed Local Plan policies will be more effective in delivering the overall policy aims for the South West Hertfordshire area.

Content of the Issues and Options document

- 1.7 The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and associated regulations leave matters such as the number and nature of consultations undertaken at the Regulation 18 stage very much to the discretion of authorities involved. It has however been agreed through the Statement of Common Ground signed by the five district authorities and county council in 2021, that engagement on the JSP will involve two Regulation 18 (R18) stages. The first will be an ‘Issues and Options’ document, focussing on establishing a clear vision and set of objectives for the plan. The second R18 stage will comprise a draft ‘Spatial Options’ document. The recent consultation was on the first of these documents – entitled ‘Realising Our Potential.’
- 1.8 This consultation document set out the long term planning issues that are expected to face the SW Herts area to 2050, and suggested some broad principles that could be used to develop a plan to address these issues. It also began a high level discussion on the types of future growth that could be considered for the area.
- 1.9 The document was intentionally high level at this first formal consultation stage. Importantly, it did not include any indicative housing or employment targets or suggest any locations where growth may occur. This is because:
- (a) It is unclear at the present time what any future housing and employment targets for the area will be on a long term basis; and
 - (b) Technical work to inform any decisions on the appropriate scale and location of growth has not been completed.
- 1.10 Feedback was sought through a series of yes/no questions, with the opportunity for respondents to explain the reasons for their answers.
- 1.11 All of the SW Herts authorities agreed the ‘Realising Our Potential’ document and associated Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for consultation during meetings in June and July 2022.

Sustainability Appraisal

- 1.12 As required by the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive and Government Guidance on Sustainability Appraisal as set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and associated Regulations, the Issues and Options document is accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisals Scoping Report. This was prepared by Land Use Consultants Ltd on behalf of the SW Herts authorities. The principal role of this Scoping Report is to set out a suggested framework against which future iterations of the plan could be assessed to establish its likely social, economic and environmental impacts. It also included a high level initial assessment of the proposed vision and objectives and growth types, to help ensure these are comprehensive and that any potential social, environmental and economic impacts are highlighted at an early stage in the plan-making process.
- 1.13 As the JSP progresses, the Sustainability Appraisal work will be extended to reference the conclusions of a separate process relating to the Habitats Regulations Assessment which must also accompany the later stages of a statutory plan. This will be particularly important considering the recent report prepared into the impact of visitor numbers, air pollution etc. on the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within Dacorum Borough: the impact of which extends beyond the borough boundary.
- 1.14 As required by the regulations, feedback was sought on this Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report as part of the R18 engagement.

Approach to consultation

- 1.15 As with Local Plans, there is a legal requirement to undertake public consultation on statutory Joint Strategic Plans. The broad arrangements for engagement in plan-making are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which was adopted by all the SW Herts authorities in July 2022. This SCI was supplemented by an updated Communications and Engagement Plan, prepared by specialist engagement consultants Icenl and the JSP Communications Officer, in liaison with Communications Officers at each of the participating SW Herts authorities.
- 1.16 The consultation was largely funded through a 'Proptech' grant from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) which enabled the JSP team to deploy an innovative approach to engagement using a variety of social media platforms, as well as develop a bespoke engagement website - www.swhertsplan.com. The approach to engagement was influenced by the lessons learned from a successful informal engagement 'SW Herts – Your Future' carried out in early 2020.
- 1.17 As set out in Part 1 of the Consultation Report (see Appendix 1), the engagement employed a range of tools and approaches to raise awareness and increase response rates to the consultation material, including:
- An interactive consultation document hosted on the SW Herts website, with supporting material.
 - A linked social media based campaign, supported by short videos and graphics, utilising a shortened version of the full R18 document, with simplified questions.
 - Paper copies of consultation material and response forms issued to all libraries and deposit points within the SW Herts area.
 - An introductory video hosted on SW Herts website.
 - Direct notification letters / emails to all key consultation bodies listed in the Statement of Community Involvement, plus other groups and individuals on JSP consultation database.
 - Articles in district / county e-newsletters / newsletters / magazines as timing permitted.
 - The signposting of the consultation website via the SWH partner authority websites.
 - Press release(s) – co-ordinated by JSP team and issued by each authority.
 - Business cards with QR code information on the consultation distributed to colleges, libraries and deposit points in the SW Herts area.
 - Posters provided for display at libraries and deposit points.

- An updated 'Frequently asked Questions' on website.
- Dedicated briefings for Town and Parish Councils.
- A workshop event held for sixth form students.

1.18 As this engagement took place over the summer period, it was extended from the usual six weeks to eight weeks (as per paragraph 2.12 of the Statement of Community Involvement), running from 5th September until 4th November 2022.

1.19 The social media focussed element of the engagement, ran for a more limited time period (5th to 28th September inclusive), as the results had to be reported to Government (DLUHC) by the end of September to meet the conditions of the PropTech grant. Having a shorter consultation period for the social media based element of the consultation was not problematic, as the consultants who ran this element of the engagement advised that three weeks was the optimum period for the poll to remain live and as summarised out below, the response rate achieved was very high.

Level of feedback received

1.20 As Part 2 of the Consultation Report (see Appendix 2) illustrates, the consultation is considered to have been very successful. The table below shows how responses were received via the online survey, social media hosted poll, email and letter – equating to over 3,400 responses in total. The online survey and poll alone this provided over 27,300 individual pieces of feedback. Awareness of the consultation was also very high, with the social media adverts released via the Councils' social media accounts being seen by almost 45,500 people and the website visited more than 8,700 times over the course of the consultation period.

1.21 The participation levels for the poll compare very well with the 'Your Future' poll the JSP programme carried out in early 2020. This earlier poll had 3,291 voters, casting 15,042 votes and leaving 2,082 pieces of written feedback.

Method of response	Respondees	Individual pieces of feedback
Online survey	204	2,569
Give My View poll	3,122	24,734 (including 5,198 pieces of written feedback)
Email	138	Not assessed
Letter	1	Not assessed
TOTAL	3,465	N/A

2 Key Issues/proposals/main body of the report:

Nature of feedback received

2.1 Although a number of different feedback mechanisms were used, and there were variances between the views expressed within them, some common themes did arise. These are illustrated by the word cloud below which, although generated from the poll, highlights the key issues raised across the consultation. These also reflect the concerns emerging through Local Plan consultations within the area too.

however picked up through the wording of another – as a lot of issues cut across the six thematic pillars.

- 2.6 A number of changes are recommended to the vision and associated objectives as result of the feedback received. In addition, a minor amendment is suggested to the overarching vision statement. This is to include specific reference to the word 'health' and to ensure it is clear that the future being planned for must benefit both people and the environment. The recommended revised vision statement is as follows:

Realising our Potential

“South West Herts will realise its full potential of being globally connected, nationally recognised and locally cherished. Known for its creative spirit, collaborative working and willingness to accelerate positive change, it will be a place where sustainable growth provides a better and healthy future for everyone both people and the environment.”

- 2.7 As set out in Appendix 3 some amendments are also recommended to the objectives that sit below the six thematic pillars. This includes amendments to existing objectives and the inclusion of some new ones, to improve clarity and ensure the following key issues are fully reflected:

- Historic environment;
- Both urban and rural employment sectors;
- Protection of water resources; and
- Air quality.

- 2.8 Two minor changes to phraseology are also proposed to ensure consistency of wording across the text.

Feedback on Growth Types

- 2.9 Another key aim of the consultation was to obtain feedback on potential growth options that will help inform the next stage of the JSP. The consultation asked for views on the following (albeit inter-related) typologies:

- (a) Growth within existing large settlements;
- (b) Outward growth of existing large settlements;
- (c) New settlements;
- (d) Growth of groups of settlements;
- (e) Growth along sustainable transport corridors;
- (f) Growing the best connected places; and
- (g) Scattered growth.

- 2.10 The views expressed through the consultation feedback varied depending on the category of respondent and also between the poll, survey and email responses. Many individuals expressed a strong desire to protect green spaces and the Green Belt, and some considered there should be no further growth in the area at all. Unsurprisingly, responses from developers and landowners were often influenced by the location of the site(s) they were promoting – although some did offer more balanced observations about the relative sustainability of the options suggested. ‘Growth of existing

large settlements' was generally the preferred growth type, although clear caveats were expressed with regard to density, additional infrastructure needs and the protection of greenspaces.

- 2.11 In response to the question 'Are there any other growth types we have not mentioned that you think should be considered?', no realistic alternative options were put forward. Many suggestions were outside the scope of what planning can influence, or were relevant to all growth types i.e. making best use of previously developed land and considering densification. It was also correctly noted that not all of the options put forward within the consultation were necessary alternatives – as many overlap with one another.
- 2.12 As a result, no changes are recommended to the growth types that will be considered as the JSP progresses. However the consultation responses have been passed to consultants advising the JSP programme on potential spatial strategies, as the information is very helpful in articulating the likely pros and cons, and the broad acceptability or otherwise, of the different approaches.

Feedback on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report

- 2.13 Feedback received on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report are summarised in Appendix 4. It is recommended that many of the suggested changes are not taken forward, as they related to feedback from landowners seeking a more favourable assessment of the growth type which most closely reflected their particular site(s) interest. Other comments related to the technical nature of the document, which is unfortunately hard to overcome in a report that needs to comply with specific regulatory requirements.
- 2.14 A number of changes are however recommended. These will be taken forward when the revised Scoping Report is issued later this year. The majority of these changes involve adding additional text as suggested by key organisations such as Natural England and the Environment Agency. The proposed changes to the vision and objectives will also need to be assessed by the consultants in due course.

3 Options and alternatives considered

- 3.1 Set out below are the following two alternative options that were considered and not recommended.
- 3.2 Option 1: To leave the wording of the plan vision and objectives and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report unchanged from that consulted upon. Whilst the vision and objectives and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report were generally supported by the consultation feedback, the responses received highlighted a limited number of key issues that were omitted. The proposed amendments set out in this report seek to ensure that these are included and should ensure that the vision and objectives for the JSP, and the associated Sustainability Framework against which future policies and proposals are assessed, are clearer and more comprehensive as a result.
- 3.3 Option 2: To await agreement of the vision and objectives until the next formal stage of the JSP is progressed. Early endorsement of the JSP vision and objectives will allow them to be reflected with additional weight when preparing technical work that will inform the plan, and provide a clear platform upon which Officers can progress the next iteration of the JSP.

4 Consultation

- 4.1 The following officers have been consulted on the work undertaken to date:
 - James Doe, Strategic Director (Place)
 - Sara Whelan, Assistant Director (Place)
 - Ronan Leydon, Team Leader - Strategic Planning

5 Financial and value for money implications:

- 5.1 None arising from this report. The Joint Strategic Plan Programme is supported by an annual contribution of £40k from each of the participating authorities. The costs of preparing and consulting on this Issues and Options document are however covered by a Government 'Proptech' fund grant, so is at nil capital cost to the Council.

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 None arising from this report.

7 Risk implications:

- 7.1 One of the main risks is that this Council (or another of the participating Councils) does not approve the same recommendations as set out in this report. This would delay progressing future iterations of the Plan and supporting technical work, the JSP vision and objectives would not be as comprehensive or as clear, and they will not be afforded relevant weight when preparing the evidence base to inform the Plan.

8 Equalities, Community Impact and Human Rights:

- 8.1 The Council has also undertaken a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) of the Statement of Community Involvement. This is attached in Appendix 5.
- 8.2 The consultation document was supported by an independent Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (see paragraph 9.1 for further details). The final Sustainability Appraisal report will also incorporate equalities and health impact assessments.
- 8.3 There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

9 Sustainability implications (including climate change, health and wellbeing, community safety)

- 9.1 The consultation document was supported by an independent Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report prepared by Land Use Consulting Ltd. This considers the impact of the document against a sustainability framework, covering a range of environmental, social and economic objectives. The final Sustainability Appraisal report will also incorporate a high level Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) and Health Impact Assessment (HIA).

10 Council infrastructure (including Health and Safety, HR/OD, assets and other resources)

- 10.1 None arising from this report.

11 Conclusions:

- 11.1 The production of the Joint Strategic Plan will provide a long term strategic framework for the South West Hertfordshire Authorities, including Dacorum. The JSP will focus on climate resilience, infrastructure delivery, strategic housing and employment. However it will be about more than planning and will help create a framework for investor confidence in SW Herts. The JSP will increase potential for unlocking infrastructure investment from Government, creating a bigger canvas to make decisions about future growth, allowing an infrastructure-led approach; not 'planning by numbers' and enable a coordinated approach to investment and delivery of infrastructure giving priority to strategic solutions.
- 11.2 This report seeks approval for three key early documents underpinning the JSP, without which progress on the JSP will be delayed.