

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLANNING POLICY ADVISORY PANEL WITH ST ALBANS CITY FORUM MEMBERS

held in the Council Chamber, District Council Offices, St Peter's Street, St Albans, Herts
AL1 3JE on Tuesday, 30 November 2010 at 7.00 pm

Present:

Councillors Brazier (Chair), K Morris (Vice-Chairman), Frearson, Harrison, Heritage, Leach, Myland, Pawle, Perks, Turner and Yates

St Albans City Forum members:

Councillors White (Chairman), Prowse, Wartenberg and Witherick

In Attendance:

Councillors Brewster, G Churchard, Clark and Pia

Also in Attendance:

██████████ – HCC Head of Corporate Estates
██████████ – Senior School Place Planning Officer
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██████████ – Senior Planning Officer
██████████ – Vincent and Gorbing

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor Teare
██████████ – County Planning Manager

Officers in Attendance:

██████████, Senior Planning Officer
██████████, Planning Policy Manager
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██████████, Corporate Administrator

1. SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

Introduction and purpose of the meeting

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the representatives from Hertfordshire County Council to introduce themselves. He then invited the Chair of the St Albans City Forum, Councillor White, to explain the origin of the request for the County Council to provide information on school provision. A presentation had been made to a meeting of the City Forum on 7 October 2009 on primary school provision in the City Centre and an extract from the minutes of that meeting was appended to the agenda for tonight's meeting. Councillor White drew attention to the following motion proposed by Councillor Leach to Council on 15 September 2010:

'This Council calls upon the County Council to urgently address the issue of a lack of primary school places in central St Albans.'

With the consent of the Council the Mayor had declared the motion referred to a special meeting of the Planning Policy Advisory Panel to which members of the St Albans City Forum should be invited. Members intended this meeting to be a seminar style meeting and representatives of Hertfordshire County Council had been invited to speak not only in relation to the motion as referred but also in relation to the wider issues of lack of primary and secondary school places within the City and District. Councillor White advised that he understood this meeting would address principles and issues but not specific sites as there was still further work to be done on this. There would however be another meeting to be held early in the New Year, which would include more detail regarding specific sites. Many of the issues discussed by the City Forum in October 2009 were still relevant.

The Chairman invited Councillor Leach as the mover of the motion to Council to explain his reasons. Councillor Leach advised he had submitted the motion from a growing sense of frustration that there had been little progress since the October 2009 meeting and the points and actions discussed did not appear to have been addressed.

The Chairman invited [REDACTED], School Place Planning Officer for the West area of the County, which covered the City and District, to explain what work the County Council had been doing.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] confirmed that there had been an exceptional increase in the number of pre-school age children since 2007. To address this in December 2009 the County Council had published a document titled 'Meeting the rising demand for school places'. This had been endorsed by the HCC's Education Panel and Cabinet. The document detailed all areas within the County where a deficiency of school places was forecast, together with proposals to address this. Some of the proposed solutions were still being investigated. [REDACTED] then went on to detail action taken over the past 3-4 years as set out in the document. This included three additional forms of entry at Aboyne Lodge, St Peters JMI and Maple JMI schools. Two schools, Mandeville JMI and Bernards Heath Infants and Junior had been expanded and there had been a temporary expansion of Cunningham Hill Infants and Margaret Wix Primary schools. Over the past year the County Council had been looking at all areas of the County with a forecast deficiency of places to identify all potential options for increasing places. These included expansion of existing schools and other opportunities for new provision. This work was reaching completion and a revised version of 'Meeting the rising demand for school places' would be submitted to the HCC Education Panel on 16 December. The document would contain recommendations for addressing the shortage of school places within the County, including St Albans, in the short term. This would feed into District Council strategic planning work on the Local Development Framework (LDF).

The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that District Council Officers were working closely with the County Council and their input was very helpful in relation to the Core Strategy document, which was about to go out to consultation. It was important to include appropriate proposals for the expansion of existing and location of new schools, both primary and secondary. In 2011 when the pre-submission version of the Core Strategy was produced the County's work on school provision would by then have been completed and the Core Strategy document would be able to include proposals for expansion of existing schools and sites for new educational provision.

The Chair invited [REDACTED], Senior Planning Officer to present the document [REDACTED] had tabled entitled 'Delivering secondary and primary school expansions progress update'. A copy of this document is appended to these minutes.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] explained that the information under the sub headings 'Primary School Place Planning' and 'Secondary School Place Planning' came from the September 2009 consultation response and was based on the scale of need indicated in the Regional Spatial Strategy, now to become obsolete. [REDACTED] would be working with the District Council officers on development of the LDF and Core Strategy in relation to education provision to ensure they were founded on a sound evidence base. As these documents would cover the period to 2028 it was important to address school capacity, and to develop policies with sufficient flexibility to meet changeable need. [REDACTED] then went through each section of the document in detail. Key points were:

- There was a need to tailor educational planning policies to facilitate growth of educational facilities and flexibility to enable provision of new facilities where justified by educational need. The County Council could help by demonstrating where need was justified
- 7 of the existing primary school sites were identified as having the potential to expand within the St Albans area, however only four of these were considered by HCC Children, Schools and Families (CSF) to be in the right place to make a contribution to meeting current needs from a place planning perspective
- The Core Strategy housing trajectory was very important to understanding locations, phasing and yields of housing sites in terms of quantifying and planning for new educational provision
- With regard to secondary school sites, Vincent and Gorbing had examined all existing secondary sites from a planning perspective and highways appraisals had been carried out for all 12 sites. Eight sites may have potential for expansion
- New sites that might be available for housing and delivery of new schools had also been examined, including the contribution from HCC owned land
- Attention was drawn to the methodology for identifying potential new sites with conclusions set out on pages 4-5 of the document
- It was possible some sites within the Green Belt could be used to facilitate expansion. However, more capacity was anticipated in the short term by expansion of existing sites. The County Council would work with SADC officers by helping to identify the location of sites.
- Attention was drawn to the footnote on page 5 of the document explaining the implications of Part III of the Land Compensation Act 1961 and a 'certificate of appropriate alternative development' for sites allocated for housing in relation to the cost of site acquisition for educational use.

General Discussion

██████████ SADC Head of Planning and Building Control advised that it was essential to build some flexibility into the Core Strategy going forward in order to respond to population growth and child yield.

Councillor Leach pointed out that the proposals for school provision for the period to 2012/13 discussed at the October 2009 meeting had not yet been progressed, not taking into account need to be addressed in the LDF Core Strategy. ██████████ responded that it was intended to proceed as rapidly as possible on the sites identified by CSF referred to earlier. ██████████ stressed that there were two contexts to tonight's discussion: longer term need and current issues. How to address current issues would be covered in the revised document to be considered by the Education Panel on 16 December.

Representatives attending from Wheathampstead asked whether the County Council was aware schools in that area were reaching full capacity. ██████████ confirmed that school place planning was focused on all areas within the County and current and future pupil numbers in Wheathampstead were being monitored. Sufficient capacity was forecast but monitoring would continue. ██████████ confirmed that, like its response in September 2009, HCC's response to the core strategy document would address the situation for every settlement in the District, as did the previous version. It was also confirmed that the impact of the Butterfield Road development would be taken into consideration.

Councillor Leach referred to the proposal within the Core Strategy consultation document to concentrate housing development within the existing urban footprint which meant that existing pressures would increase. He asked what planning gain there would be if applications for development within the Green Belt were allowed on appeal. ██████████ confirmed that the policy of urban concentration was difficult to plan for, unless there was sufficient information on location and phasing of sites. As previously mentioned the housing trajectory would assist in this. There was a need to identify two FE Green Belt sites as a potential reserve. ██████████ Head of Corporate Estates, added that flexibility was important so that the Council was in a position to respond to any such externally imposed demand that arose. This included the identification of existing sites that were suitable for expansion and additional sites for development.

Councillor Wartenberg asked how the County Council intended to respond regarding the increased demand that would be generated by the King Harry Lane playing fields development. ██████████ advised that work had already been undertaken to establish whether there was capacity in existing schools. For the future, forecasts already took account of known housing development which would determine whether there was either capacity in existing schools or the opportunity to develop if necessary. ██████████ confirmed that working in partnership with HCC colleagues regarding housing projections and the impact on the infrastructure would help to inform decisions on school provision. The situation was constantly evolving.

In response to a question from Councillor Heritage regarding whether based on the RSS numbers there was a perceived need for new primary and secondary schools ██████████ confirmed that even if no new housing was planned there would still be a need for prudent planning in respect of future education needs including flexibility to allow for increasing or reducing housing levels. ██████████ added that in order to increase flexibility the identification of reserve school sites should they be needed with appropriate policy was

important. [REDACTED] stated that it was better to have potential sites allocated via the planning system so that timescales were reduced if they were found to be needed.

Councillor Perks was disappointed specific sites could not be discussed at this meeting. He referred to the shortfall in school places identified in 2007 and asked whether a different forecast basis was now being used. He considered that the relationship between housing units and school places should be more transparent. [REDACTED] confirmed that a different forecasting tool was now being used and the County Council was confident in the methods and the accuracy of the data produced. The data was double checked against population data from the Census which gave a longer term projection.

The Chairman thanked the HCC representatives for attending and confirmed that a further meeting would take place early in the new year when there was further information on specific school sites.

2. **CORE STRATEGY: CONSULTATION ON STRATEGY FOR LOCATING FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE DISTRICT - DECEMBER 2010**

On 25 November the Panel had considered the revised Core Strategy consultation pamphlet and had requested that further amendments be made. A revised version of the draft consultation pamphlet taking account of the Panel's views at that meeting had been emailed to members. The Panel was invited to recommend to Cabinet at its meeting on 7 December 2010 that the revised pamphlet be endorsed, subject to any further amendments they wished to make. The draft minutes of the meeting on 25 November were also circulated and approved. **Note: these were draft minutes only.**

The Panel's comments including the following:

- Councillor Leach was concerned that the question of a five year land supply had still not been addressed
- Councillor Heritage considered that the document did not include consultation on the potential for development of new schools or expansion of existing ones in the Green Belt where there was no related housing development. This needed to be articulated, possibly in a further question
- Councillor Pawle pointed out that the County Council owned large tracts of land that could be allocated for educational uses – this had not been mentioned earlier in the evening. (Note: [REDACTED] had confirmed earlier that HCC land had been considered when assessing potential new sites).
- Councillor Kate Morris considered school provision should come before any enabling development in view of the increasing 'child yield'. She also reiterated the point made in the previous meeting concerning whether this Council should be supporting facilities that were the responsibility of another authority ie the County Council.
- Councillor Yates reiterated his view that the document should set out the issues and the options for solving them
- Councillor Turner asked for plainer language to be used to improve clarity, for example an alternative to the phrase 'infrastructure deficit'. He also queried the removal of the proposed park and ride from How Wood to the city centre, and asked whether the

potential for expansion of adult education facilities at Harpenden could be addressed within the document

- Councillor Heritage requested that the words 'featuring a bus interchange and additional car parking' be removed from the bullet point on Harpenden train station in the Transport Proposals section, since the work on the Harpenden Urban Transport Plan was not yet complete and it was not yet clear whether this was deliverable
- Councillor Pawle requested that the fourth bullet point in the Healthcare Development Proposal section be amended to read 'supporting and assisting the re-provision of services 'at' (rather than 'from') Harpenden Memorial Hospital'
- Councillor Morris requested a reference to improved facilities for walking and cycling. She also requested the removal of the wording referring to specific sections of the St Albans Green Ring in the Green corridors and spaces proposals section. It was agreed that these would be replaced with the words 'as a circular route'
- Members queried the areas shown as white in the Spatial Diagram. The Planning Policy Manager said that the white areas were not in the Green Belt, so the diagram should be amended to show these areas with a grey tone

The Head of Planning and Building Control agreed to take on board the comments made by Councillors Heritage and Morris regarding schools and revise the document accordingly. It was agreed this would be dealt with by an additional specific question. She considered that the document did address the concerns raised by Councillor Yates, the officers had worked hard to engage with members and the public, for example through the workshops, and that the document reflected a good understanding of the issues. It dealt with relationship between housing growth and infrastructure, employment and transport, together with planning for and delivery of these issues. Land use was dealt with from a spatial perspective. She recognised however that there were differing political views on what was considered to be acceptable.

RESOLVED

That Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Core Strategy: Consultation on the Strategy for Locating Future Development in the District consultation pamphlet as set out in Appendix 1 to the report for public consultation purposes, and the consultation questions, public consultation arrangements and timetable, subject to the revisions agreed at the meeting.

The Meeting ended at 8.55 pm

(SIGNED)

CHAIRMAN

**CITY AND DISTRICT OF ST ALBANS
DELIVERING SECONDARY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL EXPANSIONS
PROGRESS UPDATE TO PPAP/CITY FORUM
30 NOVEMBER 2010**

PROGRESS UPDATE

- Meeting the rising demand for school places – the educational need
- Primary school place planning
- Secondary school place planning
- Identifying capacity to expand existing schools
- Identifying potential school sites to provide future capacity
- Timescales and next steps

MEETING THE RISING DEMAND FOR SCHOOL PLACES

- Report to Cabinet 17 December 2009
- Updating forecasts – ongoing not static
- Long term requirements are changing
- Housing allocations in the Core Strategy will affect local requirements

PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING

- Primary school level - additional 16 forms of entry (FE) by 2026 and 18FE by 2031 (projected housing growth consulted on in 2009 based on RSS)
- Further 8FE of reserve capacity to cater for possible rising birth rates or child yields and housing developments on windfall sites (based on RSS)
- City Centre primaries still the immediate priority
- Most potential future need is in St Albans, but there is a need for a further 2FE in Harpenden
- Location of new school provision will also be informed by housing allocations and phasing in the Core Strategy

SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING:

- Shortage of places forecast from 2014/15
- Demand from St Albans and Harpenden together with some surplus capacity for parental preference – 12 FE to 2021 and 14 FE to 2026 (based on RSS)
- Plan for a new 6-8FE school site and a contingent reserve site.

IDENTIFYING CAPACITY TO EXPAND EXISTING PRIMARY SCHOOLS

St Albans

- 35 school sites within St Albans
- Initial preliminary town planning appraisals completed for all 35 schools
- Town planning appraisals identified potential for expansion taking account of planning constraints.
- Highway appraisals completed for 12 schools
- 12 schools may have potential to expand from a town planning perspective, of which 7 are in St Albans City
- Town planning and highway site appraisals have been considered internally by CSF officers in relation to area of educational need. Four options being considered :
 - Expansion of 4 existing school sites;
 - Open new school site and expand two existing sites;
 - Open new school site and extend age range at existing school site;
 - Extend age range at existing school site and expand two existing school sites.
- There are other primary school sites which have potential for expansion in planning/highways terms, but have been discounted by CSF officers due to the fact they are not in the current area of educational need.

Harpenden

- 12 primary school sites within Harpenden
- Initial preliminary town planning appraisals completed for all 12 schools to identify potential for expansion
- 7 schools discounted due to site specific constraints
- Highway appraisals completed for 5 schools
- Conclusions from town planning and highway appraisals:
 - 3 schools may have capacity to expand
 - 9 schools may not have capacity to expand
- Town planning and highway site appraisals been considered internally by CSF officers in relation to area of educational need. Option:
 - Expand two existing school sites

- There are other primary school sites which have potential for expansion in planning/highways terms, but have been discounted by CSF officers due to the fact they are not in the current area of educational need.

IDENTIFYING CAPACITY TO EXPAND EXISTING SECONDARY SCHOOLS

- 12 secondary schools in the District
- Initial preliminary town planning and highway site appraisals completed for all 12 schools (potential to expand each school site up to 8FE)
- 9 sites have significant site specific constraints
- Planning appraisals identified potential for new school building zones taking account of site specific sensitivities
- Highway appraisals examined impact of expansion to 8FE
- Draft conclusions from town planning and highway appraisals:
 - 6 secondary schools may have capacity to expand
 - 2 secondary schools that may have capacity to expand subject to more detailed investigations
 - 4 secondary schools may not have the capacity to expand
- Draft town planning and highway site appraisals currently being considered internally by officers of the County Council

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PRIMARY SCHOOL SITES TO PROVIDE FUTURE CAPACITY

- SHLAA sites and other County Council land identified
- Site sizes ranged from 0.6ha in central St Albans to 2.5ha elsewhere
- Mixture of urban area and Green Belt locations
- 44 sites identified through assessment process
 - 18 Harpenden
 - 26 St Albans
- Town planning appraisals of all 44 sites undertaken:
 - 40 sites initially rejected due to site specific constraints
 - 4 sites identified for highway appraisal
- Undertake highway appraisals
- 2 sites rejected following highway appraisals due to highway constraints and lack of deliverability

Conclusion

- 2 potential new primary school sites have been identified, one in St Albans and one in Harpenden

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL SECONDARY SCHOOL SITES TO PROVIDE FUTURE CAPACITY

Step 1: establishing potential secondary school site criteria:

- 12-15ha site (for 8fe capacity)
- 4ha building zone and 11ha playing fields
- In or adjacent to the urban area and avoiding locations in open countryside
- Sites should be roughly square/rectangular/flat or gently sloping if possible
- Good vehicular and pedestrian access can be achieved
- Avoid flood plains, golf courses, woodland areas, conservation interest, wildlife sites
- Preference for whole sites (not split sites)

Step 2: Assessment of development constraints

- Site size/topography
- Green Belt/Landscape Conservation and Development Areas
- Conservation/Registered Historic Parks and Gardens/Areas of Archaeological Importance
- Flood plains/woodlands/golf courses/rights of way
- Potential constraints/ noise/overhead power lines

Step 3: Town planning and highway appraisals of sites

- 27 sites identified through assessment process
- All 27 sites on the edge of urban area/all in the Green Belt:
 - 11 Harpenden
 - 13 St Albans
 - 3 London Colney
- Undertake site visits and complete initial town planning appraisals of all 30 sites
 - 18 sites initially rejected due to site specific constraints
 - 9 sites identified for highway appraisal

- Undertake highway appraisals
- Complete town planning and highway appraisals of 9 sites
- 4 sites rejected following highway appraisals

Draft conclusions

- 5 sites have potential school site status
- 2 sites being considered also have potential to provide detached playing fields to assist with expansion of existing secondary schools
- 1 site has been identified as having potential for expansion with use of SADC playing fields

CONSIDERATIONS LIKELY TO FEED THROUGH TO CORE STRATEGY REPRESENTATIONS

- MDS Green Belt site status for some sites
- Removing school sites or school building zones from the Green Belt completely for some sites
- Identifying reserve primary and secondary school sites for educational use and removing them from the Green Belt/tailoring a policy to enable them to be brought forward
- SADC playing fields – critical to the package overall
- Overlap of potential educational or residential use on a site removed from the Green Belt needs to be avoided, otherwise the site acquisition will be prohibitively expensive¹

TIMESCALES AND NEXT STEPS

- Hertfordshire County Council officers/members consideration of reports
- Education Panel: 16 December – overall strategy leading to public consultation by CSF on options
- Consider implications of Core Strategy and any associated housing trajectory evidence base for both primary and secondary. Locations,

¹ Part III of the Land Compensation Act 1961 provides a mechanism for indicating the kind of development (if any) for which planning permission can be assumed by means of a 'certificate of appropriate alternative development'. The permissions indicated in a certificate can briefly be described as those with which an owner might reasonably have expected to sell his land in the open market if it had not been publicly acquired. Therefore, if X number sites are identified as being educational sites in the development plan and they are located in the Green Belt, then the alternative use is limited to those uses which are appropriate in the Green Belt. If however, the identification is simply as a school as part of a wider housing release, then one might argue that the alternative development would be residential and the site acquisition will be prohibitively more expensive.

phasing, type and tenure of housing will impact on long term school place planning

- Representations to Core Strategy Consultation – January 2011. This work will form part of the evidence that supports the County Council's representations on behalf of CSF
- Confirm with SADC preferred options for expanding existing primary and secondary schools
- Confirm with SADC preferred options for new primary and secondary school sites
- Happy to come back and discuss individual sites and the County Council's response to the Core Strategy consultation following the end of the consultation period next year