

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE 12 JANUARY 1999

NOTE: Full copies of the reports mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Environment Committee and other members who have requested them. Any queries on these report to: Joan Blake, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Tel: 01992 555560)

1 HERTFORDSHIRE WASTE LOCAL PLAN 1995-2005

The Waste Local Plan sets out the local planning authority's detailed land-use policies for the treatment and disposal of waste, within the broad framework of the Structure Plan and considers the need for sites and facilities, suitable locations and the planning criteria likely to apply in assessing planning applications, including geological, hydrological and other considerations.

The Hertfordshire Waste Local Plan has evolved over the past 5 years. Preparation began in late 1993 when a household questionnaire survey was carried out into waste issues. This was followed by the publication of a discussion document in February 1994, accompanied by a leaflet entitled "Hertfordshire's Waste" for consultation and awareness-raising. The consideration of responses to that document formed the basis of a draft Plan, which was placed on deposit in May and June 1995 and circulated widely.

The draft Plan included three principal elements:-

- (i) Strategic policies relating to the waste management hierarchy;
- (ii) Operational policies designed to regulate and control the waste management facilities; and
- (iii) Site allocations to identify waste facilities for safeguarding and allocation of land for new waste management uses required during the Plan period.

The sustainability approach to the Plan attracted wide support, thus the majority of objections related to site specific proposals.

Following consideration of the objections, an interim draft text

of the Plan was prepared, which was subject to public consultation in May/June 1996. This allowed objectors to assess the extent to which their previous objections to the deposit draft had been overcome and for new objections and representations to be made. This document effectively formed the basis of the proposed modifications to the Draft Plan which enabled changes to be considered at the Local Plan Inquiry, which took place during November/December 1996.

The Inspector's Report was received in August 1997, which set out his recommendations with regard to the objections and proposed changes. The Inspector was largely supportive of the strategy and policies in the Plan but did recommend modifications to the Plan to improve its clarity, as well as the deletion of the policy identifying areas of search for waste to energy plants, replacing it with a criteria-based policy against which planning applications for this type of waste facility should be judged. He also recommended amendments to certain policies so that they related only to development for which the County Council is the planning authority.

Following the Waste Panel's consideration of the Inspector's recommendations, proposed modifications to the Plan were placed on formal deposit from April until June 1998. The Panel then met on three occasions to consider objections to the proposed modifications but were satisfied that the proposed additional amendments would not materially affect the content of the Plan proposals.

The notice of intention to adopt the Plan was placed in the local press during mid-October 1998 and at the meeting of the Environment Committee on 12 January 1999 the Plan was finally adopted. A Notice of Adoption will now be published and, assuming there is no legal challenge, the Plan will be printed on expiry of the six week statutory period.

2 'A 50 YEAR VISION FOR THE WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HABITATS OF HERTFORDSHIRE - A LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN'

The development of the above-named document can be traced back to the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992.

At that time, the UK government signed the Convention on Biological Diversity and committed itself to producing policies, plans and programmes for the 'conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity', which resulted in the publication in January 1994 of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Biodiversity refers to all living things and communicates an holistic view of nature conservation. In response to international and national initiatives, and particularly the publication of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Hertfordshire was prepared.

The Hertfordshire BAP or *50 Year Vision* was produced by the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust under the guidance of the Hertfordshire Environmental and Countryside Forums and was funded by a consortium of agencies, including English Nature.

The *Vision* provides a clear but ambitious framework for promoting biodiversity in Hertfordshire and aims to slow down, and hopefully reverse, many of the disturbing declines in species and habitats. It broadly divides into Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans and gives a 'vision' for enhanced biodiversity in Hertfordshire in fifty years' time.

The *Vision* provides a long-term plan for improving the condition of certain key habitats and species in the county and includes a list of proposed actions for the first ten years which have considerable implications for the work programmes of services funded by the Environment and other County Council Committees.

Of all the services, the jointly-funded Herts Biological Records Centre (HBRC) will be the most affected since the immediate implementation of all the actions attributed to HBRC could not be sustained within existing resources.

The Committee have therefore agreed that the implications of the proposed actions on the work and funding of Environment Department services should be investigated and priorities set, in particular that the Hertfordshire Biological Recording Centre, Countryside Management Service and Environmental Trusts' Management Boards be asked to make assessments of the cost of implementing the action points and report back.

The other service committees have also been requested to investigate how their actions and decisions can contribute to achieving the aims of the *Vision*.

The Hertfordshire Environmental and Countryside Forums have written to the 42 organisations listed in the *Vision*, including the County Council, inviting them to 'sign up' to the document.

It was not expected that the County Council would have to sign a binding agreement to carry out the actions in the Plan, but rather to agree to endeavour to implement the actions. In light of that, the Committee endorsed the broad aims of the Plan and agreed to the County Council becoming a co-signatory.

It is intended there will be a formal signing up ceremony in April 1999, which has been designated by the government as National Biodiversity Month.

3 SERPLAN : RESPONSE TO DETR CONSULTATION ON DEPOSIT VERSION OF REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE

The regional planning strategy “A Sustainable Development Strategy for the South East” has been produced by SERPLAN (the South East Regional Planning Conference) as the major input into the government’s next Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9), which will cover the period to 2016. A draft was produced for public consultation in May 1998 and was reported to a special meeting of the Environment Committee in July 1998, at which a response was agreed.

In light of consultation responses, SERPLAN revised the draft Regional Strategy and submitted it to the Secretary of State in December. He has now published the Strategy as Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East and this was placed ‘on deposit’ for a six week consultation period which commenced on 4 January.

Responses to this consultation will shape decisions on the scope of issues to be debated at a Public Examination of the draft in May 1999. The outcome of that will inform the government in preparing the final version of RPG9, which is currently scheduled for publication by the end of 1999. That in turn will set the context for the next review of the County Council’s Structure Plan.

The latest draft shows a number of differences from the earlier consultation document, particularly in the treatment of the “areas of economic pressure” to the south and west of London, which in turn has implications for the accommodation of additional development elsewhere in the region. Priorities for transport infrastructure across the region still have to be determined and, in the absence of specific sub-regional policies for areas such as Hertfordshire, there is concern that priority could go to “areas of economic regeneration” and “areas of economic pressure”.

Housing remains the main issue of contention. The Government’s household projections imply a requirement of 1,075,000 dwellings in the South East outside London between 1991 and 2016. SERPLAN considered this to be unattainable, given planning and environmental constraints. The strategy, therefore, outlines a “plan, monitor, manage” approach to housing provision. This means that a baseline figure of 861,700 dwellings is allocated to counties, with Hertfordshire’s allocation being 69,900. County and Unitary Councils are encouraged to make additional allocations, over and above the baseline figure in individual structure plans and unitary development plans so that the total for the region falls in the range 892,000 to 914,000 dwellings.

The Committee have agreed a response to the deposit draft which, whilst supporting the broad thrust of the strategy, particularly with regard to the sustainable theme and its recognition of the need to maintain economic prosperity whilst protecting and enhancing the environment, lists a number of areas of concern, in particular with regard to:-

- the need to maintain the balance between jobs and housing within the “areas of economic pressure” in the south and west of the region, so that housing pressures arising in that part of the region do not spill over into Hertfordshire;
- the need for firm guidance on how the “plan, monitor, manage” approach to housing provision will be implemented, so that the implications for Hertfordshire and other parts of the region can be clearly understood from the outset;
- the absence of adequate guidance on regional transport priorities and, in particular, the need for RPG9 to make a commitment to a number of significant transport proposals within Hertfordshire.

Members can refer to the full text of the resolutions agreed by the Committee in the Committee minutes of 14 January 1999.

4 CENTRAL HERTS PASSENGER TRANSIT SYSTEM (CHPTS)

A partnership group involving the University of Hertfordshire, Welwyn Hatfield District Council, St Albans City and District Council, Watford Council and the County Council was established in 1995 to consider accessibility problems in central Hertfordshire. Issues considered by the group included existing difficulties in east-west travel, the expanding University of Hertfordshire, development options for the British Aerospace site, the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, the potential for future development in the central Herts corridor and the County Council’s desire to promote an east-west sustainable transport system for the 21st Century.

They identified the need for a new way to encourage people to use passenger transport in line with the Council’s TravelWise policies, and to address the growing and predicted further traffic congestion in the already congested central area of Hertfordshire and the proposed Central Herts Passenger Transit System (CHPTS) is being promoted as the best solution to tackle these issues.

This would provide a quality passenger transport system, linking residential business and development areas, provide east-west links and integrate with the north/south rail links, in line with the emerging government policy on integrated transport. Such a system would help to relieve growing traffic congestion thus reducing pollution and enhancing the quality of life. The proposed CHPTS system would run on cleaner fuel or electricity and would provide an alternative to greater car use in an area that is already congested. It would enable wider east-west movements and would connect to the main radial rail routes encouraging greater integration and use of passenger transport in line with sustainable and TravelWise policies.

The Committee have approved the CHPTS scheme in outline and recommended widespread consultation locally.

The TPP Panel in February 1997 agreed to pursue the CHPTS proposals through the then Private Finance Initiative (PFI). That process has now been revised and expanded to become the Public Private Partnership Programme, consolidating the PFI approach. As a PFI scheme, the proposed CHPTS needs the approval of the DETR and the Treasury Project Review Group prior to proceeding further, and the Committee have agreed that an outline business case should be prepared for submission to them.

The Committee have agreed to the establishment of a joint county and district member group to assist in promoting and pursuing this high profile proposal and three County Council members will be appointed to it shortly.

B A York
Chairman
County Hall, Hertford

12 January 1999