

## HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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### REPORT OF THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE 13 APRIL 1999

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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 REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDANCE FOR THE SOUTH EAST: THE PUBLIC EXAMINATION**

The draft Regional Guidance (SERP500) produced by SERPLAN and published by the Government Office for the South East will be the subject of a Public Examination commencing on 18 May 1999. Following this the independent panel appointed to consider representations on the draft guidance will report to the Secretary of State, who will publish any necessary modifications for consultation. A final version of the new Regional Planning Guidance should then be issued in early 2000.

The region's local authorities will be represented by SERPLAN, although individual authorities will be invited on issues where they have specific involvement. Hertfordshire County Council was one of three county councils not invited to participate on any issue - Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire being the other two.

The Committee have expressed their extreme dissatisfaction, not only that the County Council has not been invited to participate, but also that there has been a failure to secure adequate representation from other authorities in the north east of the region, particularly in the discussion of countywide housing numbers, transportation and Stansted Airport related issues.

The Committee have authorised the pursuance of a legal challenge in the event that Stansted Airport related issues (including the development proposed in south east Hertfordshire to the north of Harlow) remain on the list of matters for discussion without the County Council being invited to participate.

## **2 ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 1998**

The 1998 Annual Monitoring Report is the first to be published since the adoption of the Structure Plan in April 1998. It identifies some of the major trends affecting planning policies and assesses the effectiveness and relevance of Structure Plan policies during the year up to 31 March 1998. The report comprises a series of short monitors, which explore trends for a range of topics, together with a special paper which focuses on a particularly topical issue, the topic for this year being “Urban Renaissance in Hertfordshire”.

### **2.1 Monitors**

As well as reflecting the necessity to establish a framework for monitoring critical elements of the new Structure Plan, there is also a need to continue monitoring traditional elements of the Structure Plan such as:

- numbers of dwelling commitments and completions
- dwelling potential
- employment and unemployment
- employment floorspace, commitments and capacity

The Committee have identified the need to consult with key stakeholders, particularly district councils, on how future annual reports could be expanded to track progress with other areas of the Structure Plan not currently covered.

### **2.2 Special Focus Paper - “Urban Renaissance in Hertfordshire”**

This reviews progress on urban renaissance at the national level and contains a resume of the current work programme in Hertfordshire, covering good practice gathering, technical exploration, site appraisals/ demonstration projects, and awareness raising.

### **2.3 The Findings**

The Committee have noted with pleasure the findings, in particular:

- the positive progress revealed by monitoring dwelling provision through urban regeneration
- the continued signs of a rise in economic activity
- the fall in rates of unemployment

They are also encouraged that sustainability policies for housing are proving particularly successful in that, since 1991, 83 per cent of new dwellings have been located on previously developed and infill land and by the fact that most new dwellings are of one/two bedrooms, in line with the needs of growth in the number of smaller sized households.

## 2.4 Future Work

Work will continue with district councils, both to take forward the Urban Renaissance Work programme as a means of implementing the Structure Plan's Regeneration Strategy and to refine monitoring of the progress being made towards meeting housing needs through urban regeneration.

Representation will be made to the Secretary of State asking that the guidance on the provision of affordable housing be revised since monitoring shows that the increased housing provision resulting from urban regeneration involves a high proportion of small sites below the threshold at which local authorities can negotiate affordable housing provision with developers.

## 3 **1998 ANNUAL UPDATE OF THE "STATE OF HERTFORDSHIRE'S ENVIRONMENT" REPORT**

This report was first published in 1992, since which time updates have been produced every year. It brings together environmental monitoring information from various sources across the county, using indicators to detect changes in the county's environment. The Committee have thanked the Hertfordshire Environmental Forum (HEF) for continuing to produce the report and asked that it be developed to focus on the significant environmental issues facing Hertfordshire and be presented in a way that will increase awareness of those issues with a wider audience.

The 1998 update was launched at the Annual Hertfordshire Environmental Forum Conference under the theme "Health and its Relationship with Environmental Issues". Topics covered this year are air pollution, transport, energy, waste, wildlife and habitats, water, and land use. This is the third year that progress has been measured against indicators and therefore some trends are beginning to be detected.

The key issues to emerge from this year's report are:

- the increased proportion of travel by modes other than the car
- the increasing amount of domestic waste being produced
- the increasing amount of waste being recycled
- a reduction in water consumption
- a decline in the quality of water in Hertfordshire's rivers
- a continuing decline in wildlife and habitats.

The Committee have asked HEF to consider how wider sustainability indicators could be reported on in a way which would complement the report's environmental indicators. In particular they have asked for monitors on light and noise pollution to be included as a regular feature and indicators developed for them.

The conference had highlighted the way in which health and the environment are inextricably linked and, in this context, the Committee asked HEF to prepare an action plan to address the interface between these issues.

**B A York**

Chairman

County Hall, Hertford

13 April 1999