

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF COUNTY COUNCIL TUESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2001

STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW

Report of the Director of Environment

Author: Jon Tiley

Tel: 01992 556297

Executive Member: Iris Tarry

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report provides background information for the discussions at this Extraordinary Meeting of County Council. This meeting was requisitioned to discuss the following subject :-

“To consider the Structure Plan, including publication from 1st December 2001 of the propositions made by the consultants and the extensions of the strands which lead to a potential capacity of 62,000 new dwellings by 2016”

2. Summary

- 2.1 The report sets out the stages of work that have been carried out since the County Council decided in October 1999 to commence a roll forward of the Structure Plan.
- 2.2 It explains the way in which the methodology for the Housing Capacity Study was developed in partnership with District authorities and how joint working has been taken forward under the auspices of a joint Protocol.
- 2.3 It sets out how members have been involved throughout the process, including joint member meetings with the District Councils, leading up to the County Council's decision to delay public consultation. This delay was in direct response to a request from the District Councils to allow them greater understanding of the Capacity Study.

3. Background

- 3.1 In October 1999 the Environment Committee considered a report on the Structure Plan and Greenfield Development. The Committee agreed that in order to examine how best to reduce the amount of greenfield development in the County, a review of the adopted plan should be commenced immediately. At the heart of the technical work underpinning the Review was to be a thorough investigation of the capacity of settlements in the County to accommodate the housing figures of the emerging regional planning guidance.
- 3.2 The resolution of the Committee set out the potential sources of housing capacity which were to be investigated (see Appendix 1). It was also agreed that whilst work on the physical capacity should be commenced, an initiative examining the qualitative aspects of development in towns should be launched, with a particular focus on how to achieve an “urban renaissance” in a Hertfordshire context.
- 3.3 Technical work on the housing capacity study commenced in early 2000, with the development of a methodology, in consultation with officers from the Districts. This was based on the lessons learnt from the 1995 Housing Capacity Study together with the guidance contained in Planning Policy Note 3. As more detailed guidance on methodology emerged in the form of “Tapping the Potential”, further revisions were made to conform with best practice.
- 3.4 A key element of the study was a survey of the most accessible areas of the main settlements in the County by consultants. The approach for this aspect of the Study was refined after a pilot exercise based on Hertford. Consultants were then employed to carry out a countywide survey.
- 3.5 An objective of the Capacity Study was that it should, as far as possible, be a joint exercise with District Councils. Indeed it was acknowledged that only with a major technical input from District Officers could the Study be progressed. Whilst informal liaison took place, technical issues were discussed more formally through a Housing Capacity Reference group, which met 6 times between June 2000 and July 2001. In addition, further discussion with Districts took place at the Development Plans Sub Committee of the Hertfordshire Technical Chief Officers Association (HTCOA).
- 3.6 One of the outputs of the joint working at officer level was A Protocol which set out arrangements for joint working and the handling of sensitive material.
- 3.7 There have also been 4 Joint Member Meetings over the same period, which have been used to update District Council Members on the progress on the Structure Plan Roll Forward and how this fits in to emerging regional planning issues.

3.8 The programme and content of the technical work being undertaken was reported and discussed initially through the Structure Plan Task Group, and then from October 2000 through the newly formed Structure Plan Panel.

3.9 The Panel has now met a total of eight times over the last thirteen months, to consider progress on the Roll Forward, the development of the methodology and emerging results from the Housing Capacity Study, and other strategic planning issues. In particular, there have been interim reports on the following strands of the Capacity Study:-

House to flat conversions	November 2000
Allotments	November 2000
Health Care Land	February 2001
Space over shops	February 2001
Employment land	March 2001

3.10 In parallel, the Hertfordshire Town Renaissance campaign was launched in early 2000, with a conference which attracted interest from a wide variety of groups. The Campaign has gone on to hold a variety of technical seminars and events during the last 18 months. In addition, to engage a wider audience in the debate about quality development and the use of previously developed land, a Roadshow visited 29 venues in the County during January and February 2001. The issues raised through Stage 1 of the Campaign were documented and then taken into account as the Capacity Study progressed. The Stage 1 report was launched at a Conference in Letchworth on 13 October which confirmed the strategic role of the Campaign in taking the issue of debating high quality development forward. Again, the Structure Plan Panel has received regular updates on the progress of the Campaign.

3.11 Whilst these major pieces of work were being undertaken, the debate about the housing figure for the County to be contained in Regional Planning Guidance Note 9 (RPG 9) continued. Eventually in January 2001, Central Government published the final version of the RPG . This set the annual rate for housing completions in the County at 3280 dwellings. Whilst the RPG indicated that these rates should apply to the period up to 2006, it was also stated that this rate should be applied for plans covering a longer period, until a review of regional guidance advised otherwise. In the context of the Structure Plan Roll Forward plan period, this produces a total housing figure for 2001 to 2016 of 49,200 dwellings.

3.12 By the end of September 2001, numerical work on the Housing Capacity Study had reached a stage where a first estimate could be made of the countywide potential capacity over the period 2001 to 2016. The numerical estimate of the Capacity Study was based upon :-

- the potential to provide more homes on sites already identified for housing;
- analysis of recent trends in different types of development, and the factors which are likely to influence how these trends may change in the future, and
- analysis of specific surveys of some areas of towns.

3.13 The preliminary result estimated the potential capacity in the County up to 2016 to be approximately 62,000 dwellings. Of this figure, approximately 30,000 were either commitments or identified sites, with the remainder being potential calculated through research.

3.14 As indicated above, the individual strands of the Capacity Study were calculated using different approaches. The majority of strands were calculated by analysing building rates over the last ten years, and taking a view as to how those rates would change in the period up to 2016. For the most accessible areas strand, the estimate was based on a discounted assessment of the consultants' propositions. For other strands the consultants' work was used to give examples of the type of sites which might come forward from that land use category. The table below summarises these findings for each strand, shows the basis upon which the estimate was arrived at, and lastly shows what the estimate of potential would be if the development rates of the last ten years were simply projected forwards to 2016:-

Capacity Strand	Estimated Capacity	Basis of calculation	Extrapolation of ten year building rate
Accessible areas	9,300	Survey and estimate	3,300
Housing Areas	9400	Estimate	9,600
Employment Uses	12,200	Estimate	10,200
Education Uses	4,600	Estimate	5,300
Health Uses	2,000	Direct consultation	4,500
Allotments	1,100	Estimate	1000
Other opportunities	5,900	Estimate	5,900
Green Field sites	13,200	Development Plans	Not applicable
Increase density	2600	Estimate	Not applicable
Villages	2,200	Estimate	2,500
Unimplemented sites allowance	-700	Estimate	
Total	62,000		

3.15 The Structure Plan Panel discussed the form of public consultation to be followed for the Structure Plan Roll Forward in November 2000, and this was confirmed again at the Panel Meeting in September 2001. The proposal was to have two stages of pre deposit consultation. The first stage would concentrate primarily on the initial results of the Capacity Study. The second stage of pre deposit consultation, would then move on to consider a draft development strategy and District housing distribution, having considered the response to the Housing Capacity work. Only after these two stages would the County Council move to placing its revised Structure Plan on deposit, for the formal stage of public consultation.

- 3.16 The Structure Plan Panel on 5 October was to consider a report on the initial findings of the Capacity Study, with a view to advising the Executive Member on the form and content of public consultation. This would then to have been considered by Cabinet and Executive Committee on 15 October, with a view to consultation starting at the end of October. The original report to the Panel proposed that access be given to all the technical material which had been used to arrive at the potential capacity estimate of 62,000 dwellings.
- 3.17 On the evening of 4 October, a Joint Member Meeting took place, at which District representatives were to be briefed on the initial findings of the Housing Capacity Study and the proposals for Public Consultation, simultaneously with County Council members.
- 3.18 However, at the Joint Member meeting, a number of District Council representatives made very strong representations asking for the proposed process of consultation to be halted. Concerns were expressed about the Capacity Study results and that Districts had not had time to understand the assumptions behind the preliminary figures. It was alleged that the County Council were not acting in the spirit of the joint protocol covering the Capacity Study, and that more opportunity should be given to trying to reach a consensus on the Capacity Study results.
- 3.19 A formal resolution was proposed and passed, which was worded as follows :-
- “The District Councils strongly urge the County Council to defer any public consultation on the Structure Plan until after Districts have had time to consider the technical background papers and an opportunity to meet to try to achieve a consensus view on the proposals put before the public in accordance with the agreed joint protocol.”
- 3.20 The Structure Plan Panel considered the material before them in the light of this resolution and other comments made by the Districts, at its meeting on 5 October. The Panel decided to recommend to Cabinet that public consultation on the Structure Plan be deferred in order to allow more discussion with Districts at officer and member level. It was further recommended that these discussions be concluded at the beginning of December by another Joint Member Meeting, to confirm the views of the Districts. The Structure Plan Panel then undertook to meet again to consider the next steps in the Structure Plan process.
- 3.21 Turning to the availability of material in the interim, it was recommended that in the light of the request from Districts, the site specific element of the consultant’s work should continue to be considered as material confidential to the Local Authorities. However, it was acknowledged that if any approaches were made by interested parties concerning the information that was already in the public realm, through its discussion at Structure Plan Panel, then officers be authorised to respond.

3.22 Executive Committee on the 15 October endorsed the recommendations of the Cabinet and passed the following resolutions :-

(a) a programme of officer and Member meetings be arranged with each District, in order to ensure their understanding of the content and assumptions of the Housing Capacity Study and to seek views on the initial results;

(b) this programme of meetings be completed over the next six weeks and be followed by a further Joint Member Meeting in early December to enable Districts to exchange their views:

(c) following the Joint Member Meeting, the Structure Plan Panel should meet to take stock and recommend the next steps in the Roll Forward process; and,

(d) during this period officers continue to respond to any enquiries relating to the publicly available papers.

3.23 At the time of writing this report, the programme of meetings with District officers and Members is under way, and is due to be completed by the end of November. The Joint Member Meeting, referred to in the Cabinet and Executive Committee Resolutions, has now been confirmed for Thursday 6 December. Finally, the Structure Plan Panel is due to meet to consider the views of the Districts and consider the next stage in the process on Wednesday 12 December.

3.24 The Executive Committee on 19 November 2001 considered this matter and resolved that:

1. *To correct the misleading information that is being communicated to the public, the Consultant's propositions be made immediately available for public inspection.*
2. *The County Council thanks those District Councils who have worked with them on this process.*
3. *That the Leader's response to Watford dated 22 October be endorsed as the basis of the response to Watford's letter of 7 November.*