

SCRUTINY OF THE INTEGRATED PLAN PROPOSALS 2016/17 – 2019/20

PORTFOLIO: ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Environment Planning and Transport portfolio has a key role in the long term stewardship of the quality of life of Hertfordshire through place-based services such as Spatial Planning and Economy, Environmental Resources Planning, Passenger Transport, Countryside Management and Rights of Way and the development of key planning policy frameworks.

5 Key issues

- Tree health issues converging on Hertfordshire with an as yet unpredictable financial and environmental impact upon the county and the county council's land and highways assets
- A lack of clarity over government funding for the new burden in relation to the role of the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) alongside unrealistic and/or misunderstood expectations of the role continue to adversely impact on service delivery. Increasing demand linked to extreme weather events adds to the pressure on the service
- Safeguarding the interests of Hertfordshire in relation to the future growth of London and surrounding areas, airport expansion and the development of strategic rail infrastructure
- Continuing to work with the Districts via the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP) on the development and coordination of Local Plans and a longer term spatial framework and Transport Vision for the county, the provision of appropriate infrastructure to support growth, the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and other sources of funding for infrastructure
- Continued review of Hertfordshire County Council subsidised bus services to ensure all deliver value for money within existing policy framework

KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS

STRATEGY AND CAPITAL INVESTMENT

How do the future service plan priorities contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Opportunity to Thrive.

The Spatial Planning team works with the HIPP to bring forward plans for sustainable development and protect the interests of Hertfordshire in terms of development pressures from London and adjacent areas and airport expansion.

The work of our Countryside Management Service (CMS) and Rights of Way (RoW) teams are key to enabling access to the countryside, enhancing ecological and landscape diversity and improving open spaces and woodlands. In particular the CMS involves local communities in all aspects of this activity.

The advice and guidance provided to the local planning authorities on development management decisions in relation to ecology, flood risk, drainage, landscape and historic environment is aimed at creating better, healthier living environment for residents and businesses.

We contribute to promoting a reduced carbon footprint by encouraging sustainable modes of transport.

Opportunity to be Healthy and Safe.

The Passenger Transport teams work closely with Health to provide transport to hospital and other medical appointments through the non-emergency patient transport contract and the Travelink service.

Healthy lifestyles are supported by CMS and RoW in delivering a comprehensive programme of volunteer led health walks and environmental volunteering opportunities, promoting alternative transport modes to the car, delivering walking and cycling improvement schemes and overseeing a well maintained rights of way network and other accessible natural assets enhancing public health through outdoor recreation.

In its capacity as Lead Local Flood Authority for Hertfordshire the service has a duty to investigate flooding incidents and report publicly on the findings. This can lead to improvement in flood risk management, including where possible the mitigation or removal of flood risk from affected properties.

Opportunity to Take Part.

CMS work closely with town and parish councils and community and voluntary groups to develop, fund and deliver environmental schemes in local areas. We engage with communities in our planning for improvements to the natural environment and green space.

We actively support and encourage environmental volunteering through initiatives such as health walks and conservation and access improvement projects.

Opportunity to Prosper.

Our Spatial Planning team helps plan for the county's future growth and prosperity by working closely with the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and planning appropriate infrastructure for the future.

Our transport team works with bus and rail operators to provide a network of reliable bus services and improvements to stations and rail services and enabling people who do not have their own transport to access education, employment and training opportunities.

How are you managing your service to make it more efficient?

The Spatial Planning Unit is subject to annual review through the business planning process, which examines the political and technical challenges for the next financial year and identifies the most efficient way of responding to those challenges. Efficiency savings have been made across the four teams all of which have statutory responsibilities for various services/functions.

Transport Access and Safety (TAS) work closely with bus and taxi operators to reduce the financial burden to the County Council through, where appropriate, merging contracts and/or target service delivery to where it is most needed.

Following a recent consultation on bus services supported by the council, we were able to negotiate a number of contracts to be taken on commercially by the private operators to mitigate the impact on passengers.

Efficiency savings have been made by reviewing pricing strategies and the use of technology to encourage channel shift and drive down costs. For example, the SaverCard costs £20 per year for paper applications but we offer a discounted rate of £15 for online applications which has seen rise from 25% to 89% during 2015.

The Access & RoW Service has reduced staff numbers, leading to officers covering bigger geographical areas and increased the use of volunteers wherever possible to stretch resources further. Volunteers also play an active role in much of the work of the CMS including playing an administrative role to try to sustain the Hertfordshire Health Walks initiative.

The Environment Resource Planning service cost recovery on services provided to third parties, notably the district councils. In addition it is cutting overhead costs for services notably in relation to the ecological advice service provided to the local planning authorities.

How are you developing and delivering partnership approaches to make best use of the Hertfordshire pound and improve outcomes for our citizens?

Partnership working within these services has been effective for many years with the aim to deliver the best value for the Hertfordshire Pound:

Spatial Planning and Economy - The county council hosts one of the few partnership functions in planning in the Information and Monitoring Service and the Smart Herts system.

The County Council's main external planning partnership work is centred on the HIPP, together with the supporting Hertfordshire Planning Officers Group (HPOG). Wherever possible joint approaches to planning research are explored through HPOG and HIPP, and this has resulted in a number of joint studies over the years including the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Study and the current Water study.

TAS - The contract management & quality monitoring teams work with District/Borough Taxi Licensing Officers and with Driver Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) officers to ensure the transport we contract is safe and legal.

The County Council leads on the Intalink Partnership, involving bus operators, rail companies and district and borough councils.

The service works closely with community & voluntary transport groups across the county to develop and fund transport schemes in local communities.

The Passenger Transport Hub works closely with Children's Services, CS Brokerage and HCS through Service Level Agreements (SLA) to deliver cost effective client transport services on their behalf.

The Countryside Management Service (CMS), currently a joint funded service, has an excellent and long standing track record of continuing to secure external funding and maximising the impact of volunteer involvement to deliver the planned management of the county council's natural assets. This volunteer activity has been extended to deliver aspects of the Rights of Way Service works programme.

RoW - The service works with HertsLAF (Local Access Forum) representing all user groups and landowners to seek consensus between user groups. In addition, there is regular liaison with the Chilterns AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), Groundwork Trust and other key stakeholders in the County. The service delivers the majority of its works programme via the use of small local Hertfordshire contractors, plus partnerships with Parish Councils and volunteer groups.

ERP – the service actively works with the district councils, the Environment Agency and Thames Water aiming to deliver effective flood risk management and to develop appropriate flood risk schemes. This includes partnership working on scheme development funded nationally and regionally through the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

The service also provides specialist archaeology and ecological planning support services that are in part paid for by the Local Planning Authorities (LPA). Delivery of the specialist services to the majority of LPA's ensures that they can be delivered effectively, efficiently and in a resilient manner.

How have you prioritised capital investment and what opportunities have you considered that might mitigate or reduce future capital and/or revenue costs?

The Passenger Transport capital expenditure for rail station forecourts is prioritised to where the rail industry (Network Rail and the train operators) is able to invest, so that the County Council can get the maximum value for its funding and the greatest benefits for the travelling public can be achieved.

In addition, capital grants are made to community and voluntary groups to support the purchase of vehicles to provide services in local areas.

New vehicles with an improved specification are on order as part of the Dial-a-Ride vehicle replacement programme and will be delivered before the end of the current financial year. These vehicles will bring in more income by allowing more flexible services and encouraging greater usage. In the meantime, the life of the existing vehicles has been extended to maximise value for money and the existing budget for vehicle replacement has been re-profiled in order to deliver a more cost effective and diversified service in the future.

Small scale capital investment has helped the CMS secure external funding at a leverage ratio of around 1 to 10 and deliver land management and recreational improvements to the county council's natural assets. This, in turn, has helped reduce routine maintenance liabilities.

Within Access & RoW, capital spend is prioritised on service improvements works designed to decrease the amount of routine maintenance

Have you considered any other investment approaches to reduce future costs to the authority?

The Spatial Planning and Highways teams work closely with the LEP to secure Single Local Growth Fund (SLGF) for Hertfordshire County Council infrastructure priorities. It is important to sustain this relationship as the LEP will continue to be the route through which future government funding is channelled. Working closely with HIPP on the introduction of CIL is also a key priority to ensure future funding for key infrastructure e.g. roads and schools.

Passenger Transport has fully upgraded the Intalink website to make it fully integrated with all platforms (PC, tablet, smartphone) and introduced ticketing on mobile phones. The mobile ticketing bar code project is the first in the country to use mobiles and bar codes on buses. The project will show efficiencies in bus timings and boarding times. Three operators (UNO, Red Rose and Metroline) have joined the project currently.

The Access & RoW Service's future spend is linked to Hertfordshire County Council's statutory duties and the service has officers fully engaged in influencing new primary legislation to reduce burdens, guide deregulation and increase efficiency in RoW processes.

In other areas, bidding to regional and national funding sources to support flood risk management work is ongoing.

The Passenger Transport Hub has been created to bring together all of the county council's transport procurement activity and so benefit from economies of scale, whilst ensuring best value and compliance with procurement requirements. Further activity is underway to investigate bringing the County Council's passenger together under one umbrella in order to ensure efficient use of the fleet across all services and reduce expenditure on contracted transport.

ENGAGEMENT

How have the proposals been informed by staff/public/partner/staff engagement?

The Transport Vision for Hertfordshire is being developed by a cross department officer group and has been informed by engagement and consultation with businesses, districts, the LEP and other stakeholders.

Many of our services are involved in promoting sustainable transport and engage with various stakeholders to do this. The Year of Walking programme in 2015 has been coordinated by the CMS in conjunction with Public Health. The programme is delivered in partnership with TAS, district and borough councils, community groups, charitable organisations, health organisations and walking groups. Similarly, the Hertfordshire Cycling programme is being led by TAS working closely with Public Health and is being developed in conjunction with district and borough councils, local cycling groups, national cycling organisations and Public Health England.

In other areas, all land management proposals that are developed by the CMS follow a planned process that informs and engages with colleagues, partners and local people.

The RoW Service priorities are informed by engagement with parish and town councils and the public including through main stakeholder group representation.

In areas relating to transport, public Transport promotion and publicity, including multi-operator ticketing schemes, is led by the Intalink Partnership. The Partnership is made up of the County Council, bus operators, rail companies and district and borough councils. TAS also works closely with community and voluntary groups to identify develop and support services that will be beneficial to residents in the local area.

In determining the County Council's future level of support for local bus services, a public consultation exercise was held in early 2015. Following detailed analysis of the responses and debate by Members, amended bus services were introduced in September 2015.

How do your proposals support engagement with or delivery to local communities including the enhancement of the role and visibility of Members?

Enhancement of green space and accessible natural assets is nearly always community lead and often results in the establishment of a Friends Group and volunteer tasks for self-sustaining maintenance regimes. Members are associated with schemes from inception to celebration and have the opportunity to use their Locality Budgets to help secure additional external funding. Where S106 is to be allocated, this process also engages with members.

Town and parish councils are supported to participate in work on definitive rights of way and other natural assets through advice, volunteering, externally funded initiatives and the locally determined Parish Paths Partnership scheme (seed funding for local RoW schemes).

Communities affected by flooding are actively engaged with and includes involvement of the local Member.

To what extent do your proposals encourage self-reliance e.g. volunteering, accessing services on line etc enabling people and communities to help themselves?

Volunteering

Environmental volunteering (including Hertfordshire Health Walks) contributes more than twenty thousand hours of activity annually across a range of tasks and events. Nationally accredited as an Investor in Volunteers (IiV), the CMS runs regular, weekly volunteer teams and enables Friends Group, volunteer work parties as well as thousands of volunteer led health walks each year. Training and support material enables greater self-reliance for the Volunteer Health Walk Leaders, conservation and access volunteers and the multiple Friends Groups maintaining green spaces.

In addition, Hertfordshire Health Walks registration and administration is managed through a self-service web portal that enables users and volunteers to undertake these simple tasks directly and has enabled scheme growth. All CMS products have an online availability and the CMS has a strong and positive social media following.

Accessing services online

Information and applications for some of our services are now online. These include:

- RoW application forms and background material for users applying for legal changes to the definitive map .Customers can access the map on line to plan walks and rides
- Improved information and membership application form for Dial-a-Ride

- Online applications for SaverCard for 11-18 year olds was launched this year with 85% applying online

Looking ahead, the public should be able to access more information about planning applications and the planning histories of sites on line. This follows proposed efficiencies in the Development Management team which have been brought forward following an external review of the service and are predicated on improving the on line planning administration system and scanning historical records which will then be available on line.

Elsewhere, for communities affected by flooding the County Council will usually present a range of measures aimed to mitigate or reduce flooding including those that can be undertaken by the community to in effect help themselves.

PERFORMANCE, STANDARDS & TARGETS

What contribution are you making to the broader partnership working both within Hertfordshire County council and outside?

Partnership working in the Spatial Planning function is largely through the HIPP, where the County Council contributes to a jointly appointed resource which carries out some strategic planning functions on behalf of the 11 planning authorities in the county. In addition, the County Council delivers planning information and monitoring service for the county, with the district and borough councils helping to fund approximately 50% of the cost of that function.

The Passenger Transport Hub in TAS manages SLAs with Children's Services, CS Brokerage and HCS to deliver effective client transport services on their behalf.

RoW Service priorities are informed by engagement with the HertsLAF, district planners, parish and town councils and the public through main user groups' representation, including Sustrans for the National Cycle Network (NCN); officers represent the service at the Police-run county fly-tipping forum and the Chilterns AONB RAG (Recreation & Access Group) meetings.

As a jointly funded service, the CMS receives part of its core subscription and project funding from five of Hertfordshire's district and borough councils. In particular, Hertfordshire Health Walks initiative, coordinated by the CMS, significantly contributes to the Public Health prevention agenda, delivering a barrier free, physical activity intervention that initiates and sustains a healthy lifestyle and improves mental wellbeing.

In areas relating to transport, we actively engage with the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO) to gather data on a range of transport related services but also to share best practice for addressing some of the challenges faced by the sector and to learn from each other. ATCO provides a country-wide forum for local authority officers working in the field of passenger transport to network and promote best practice.

In addition, TAS engages in a number of transport executive committees, including "Local bus" and "Rail", which respond through ATCO on behalf of local authorities

on consultations from central government and lobby ministers on particular issues or legislation.

On a more specific level, ATCO runs several Best Practice Forums, such as the Publicity & Marketing Best Practice Forum. This is the opportunity for member authorities to compare their transport publicity with what is produced by others and set national standards through promoting best practice.

Finally, the contract management & quality monitoring teams in TAS work with District/Borough Taxi Licensing Officers and with DVSA officers to ensure the transport we contract is safe and legal.

What contribution is your service making towards the efficiency savings Hertfordshire County Council needs to make?

A recent review of Development Management (DM) identified efficiency savings of £80k which are in the current IP.

Through outsourcing the production of Saver cards during 2015-16, TAS has been able to reduce operating costs by £60k a year.

TAS is reviewing its structures and costs and anticipates savings of £150k during 2016-17 rising to £300k the following year.

The Environment Resource Planning team is planning to deliver £75k of savings for 2016/17 through a mixture of resource efficiencies and through increased income generation for planning support services. In addition new income streams are being developed, notably that for pre-application advice in relation to drainage proposals on major development in the county.

What is your services contribution to the IP cross-cutting themes and how are these impacting on your proposals?

Our services are supporting a range of corporate projects. This includes:

- Actively promoting Enabling the Worker programme
- Engaging with those leading on the development of the council's new website, a key element of this IP cross-cutting theme, in order to enable residents to access our services more effectively online.

Specifically within services, following a review of charges, RoW is introducing charging more for all applications including pre-application advice.

How are you continuing to drive service improvement and how do you compare against the top performers in your area?

Given the nature of planning, the major fee earning potential is in the Development Management service, where fees are set by central government. However, on average the fees recovered for planning applications and monitoring visits equate to approximately 40% of the cost of the function.

In terms of cost comparisons to other County Council and unitary planning authorities, the cost profile for the Authority is extremely good. Figures from the PSAA (formerly Audit Commission) for 2013/14, records that spend per head on planning in the county was £3.71, which placed Hertfordshire in the lowest 20% of all counties and Unitaries in the country.

Broken down further, the Development Control function was in the lowest 10% in the country for cost, whilst the policy function was in the lowest third. The Development Control performance is an extremely good result, given that we are exceeding the Government's target for the time taken to determine major county matter planning applications (currently set at 50% within 13 weeks) and are performing at 100%. This is better than some of our neighbouring and comparator county councils.

The ATCO Benchmarking survey 2014 shows that Hertfordshire is in line with the national average for Special Education Needs (SEN) in relation to the costs per pupil for school transport.

Hertfordshire scores highly in its coverage of information displayed at bus stops at twice the national average (90% vs 49%), and with the second highest figure for all shire counties (the highest being 93%).

Services such as the CMS are delivered through a locally relevant and unique model. Local indicators exist for services but national comparison is difficult. Engagement at regional and national forum at a professional level is common place and allows learning to be brought back to the authority. There has been direct involvement with national working groups related to tree health and volunteering on rights of way. The Hertfordshire Health Walks are nationally accredited, recognised as the largest scheme in England and one of the leaders on efficiency.

Performance in RoW is reported via a former nationwide Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) measure, still used by approximately 50% of local authorities. Current performance of the RoW Network classed as 'easy to use' is at 72%. This is a broadly average position when compared with the eastern region.

SUSTAINABILITY, DELIVERABILITY & IMPLEMENTATION

How is your service supporting economic growth and prosperity?

The Planning service has a key role to play in supporting economic growth and prosperity. Whilst the County Council is no longer a statutory strategic planning authority, it still plays an important role in representing the County Council when dealing with the plans of other authorities such as London as well as the proposals for other major economic drivers such as the nearby airports.

In addition, Minerals and Waste facilities are key to supporting the construction industry and commerce in general. Having up to date and effective Minerals and Waste Plans which secure an adequate supply of mineral for building and adequate facilities to deal with waste are important components of a healthy and prosperous economy.

In addition, within the Spatial Planning Unit sits the strategic transport policy function and ensuring that our transport system facilitates economic prosperity is a key driver for the county council.

Also sitting within the Spatial Planning Unit is the Growth and Prosperity function for the county council, acting as the principle point of contact between the County Council and Hertfordshire LEP. It also coordinates the activities across the whole of the county council's service delivery areas to be effective in supporting the economic aspirations for the county.

TAS works with businesses to help reduce their transport-related costs, working on 40 travel plans per year and currently engaging with 76 companies through the BigHertsBigIdeas for Business initiative.

The CMS and RoW services are working with district and borough councils and other partners to deliver improvements to rights of way and accessible natural assets to deliver routes for alternative modes of travel (non-motorised) for residents. External sources of funding including the Local Sustainable Transport Fund and S106 are secured to enable these.

The RoW service maintains and improves the walking & cycling environment to contribute to sustainable transport, safe routes to schools and local routes to reduce traffic congestion and promote quality of life in Hertfordshire.

What effect is the change in the economy and society having on your services? e.g. levels of demand, inflation, charging income etc. and how are these impacts being managed or mitigated?

Levels of demand

Hertfordshire is under significant growth pressure arising from population and household growth and the need for new jobs as the economy takes off. Between now and 2031 an estimated 66,000 new homes are planned in Local Plans being developed by the districts. This will place further strain on already overstretched infrastructure in Hertfordshire and the need to find appropriate transport solutions for the future and significant levels of funding.

A growing economy inevitably leads to a higher demand for minerals for construction and the production of more waste. It is anticipated that as the economy recovers the numbers of planning applications for the extraction of minerals and the provision of waste facilities will increase. Simultaneously, population increases are leading to a higher number of planning applications for new educational facilities

In Access & RoW, the number of reports received from users (an indicator of overall demand) is growing annually. In response, the service has a robust prioritisation system.

Increasing levels of development and development pressure are creating an increase in demand for services provided by the archaeology and ecological teams. This is being managed through increased charging to support the

increased workload and we are able to bring in short term resource to cover for these increased service demands.

Economic pressure

The availability of environmental grants from government has been reducing. Some other grants are available to support enhancement of natural assets for people, wildlife and landscape but these are of a smaller scale generally. CMS is working to access and maximise a broader range of funding sources including the Heritage Lottery Fund, Landfill Communities Fund and local S106 agreements.

In addition, while tree health issues facing Hertfordshire have not yet materialised to their full extent, the implications are likely to be significant when they do. The direct pressure on the CMS will be limited in comparison to Highways. However, the advisory role taken by CMS on such matters is likely to grow in the coming 3 years. Action planning is underway to secure networks and develop advice to ensure that Hertfordshire's response is appropriate and sustainable.

In recent years, inflation costs in RoW have been kept minimal or to zero. When the main mowing and clearance contracts are retendered during 2016, it is likely that inflation increase will be necessary.

What are the major risks to delivery of your proposals and how are you proposing to manage these? e.g. capacity, time, budget in regard to these proposals.

In relation to Passenger Transport, a key challenge is how to make bus services economic and effective across a diverse county like Hertfordshire.

The Access & RoW Service's major risks are storm and winter damage and legal challenges. Maintenance responses are prioritised robustly and the risks of legal challenges are minimised through negotiation and compromise wherever possible.

There is a risk that those organisations who purchase services from the County Council are unable to meet any increase in cost for the service and that this could lead to a reduction in income if they pull out of the service. This is being managed through effective dialogue with our customers and by ensuring that any changes to projected income level are known about sufficiently in advance for the service to be modified, either for an increase or decrease in activity.

What is the basis of your demographic predictions? What effect is demographic change having on your service? How flexible is your budget to demographic changes?

The demographic projections of school age children will lead to an increase number of applications for school facilities which the Planning service will be responsible for determining. It will also impact the transport services delivered on behalf of Children's Services to schools and colleges for entitled children. Similarly, demographic changes in the older population impact the transport provision on behalf of HCS. As a result, the service is in regular discussion with these key departments to ensure that services and resources are targeted to meet our statutory obligations.

A major area of uncertainty is the timing of when new housing developments will actually come forward in the county, given that many of them are controversial, complex and of a considerable scale.

The Access & RoW Service's levels of demand for maintenance services increase as more users access the network and demand for input to development management functions increase with inappropriate development proposals. Front line service delivery will seek to deliver a more effective and efficient service ensuring cost recovery where appropriate.

