DRAFT RURAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

Report of the Director of Environment and Infrastructure

Author: Rajesh Kungur, Senior Transport Planning and Policy Officer, Strategic Transport and Rail (Tel: 01992 555282)

Executive Member: Derrick Ashley, Growth, Infrastructure, Planning and the Economy

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the main content of the draft Rural Transport Strategy (appendix A to the report), share the key themes raised from the strategy consultation, and ask the Panel for comments prior to it being published.

2. Background

2.1 The Local Transport Plan (LTP4) was published in May 2018 and sets out the overall direction for transport in Hertfordshire, including the County Council’s policies and aspirations for infrastructure and services for the period up to 2031.

2.2 The LTP4 will be supported by a series of supporting documents which will provide further detail on particular topics and geographic areas. This includes the Rural Transport Strategy.

2.3 The County Council currently has a Rural Transport Strategy which was adopted in 2012. It was agreed at the Environment, Planning and Transport Cabinet Panel in April 2018 that this should be renewed in lieu of having a specific rural policy in the Local Transport Plan.

3. Summary

3.1 The draft Rural Transport strategy highlights and helps to deliver the objectives of the LTP4 which relate to rural transport needs and
supports any other LTP4 policies which may have some significance to rural areas.

The overall aim of the strategy is to gain an up to date understanding of rural transport issues in the county, to influence local policies and activities to better meet rural transport needs. Specific aims are therefore to:

- Identify the most significant rural challenges and issues in Hertfordshire;
- Highlight how these issues can be addressed by LTP4 policies.

3.2 The draft Rural Transport Strategy underwent internal engagement with relevant Hertfordshire County Council officers and was subject to a consultation with District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils between 23 May 2019 to 4 July 2019. Comments received were generally supportive of the content, data and research undertaken, however some issues were raised regarding the absence of specific policies, schemes and committed funding for rural areas as highlighted in section 6 of this paper.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The Panel is asked to note the draft Rural Transport Strategy which will subsequently be published as a supporting document to the Local Transport Plan.

5. Content

5.1 The new Rural Transport Strategy builds on the content of the previous one by updating the information to current day and includes a section on improvement in technology which can benefit rural areas. Like the old strategy, the new draft builds upon an evidence base to identify the issues, challenges and opportunities faced in rural areas however, unlike the old version, this strategy directly links these with LTP4 policies.

5.2 The content firstly explains the purpose of the strategy and explains the rural characterisation in relation to Hertfordshire. It includes links to other strategies, specifically LTP4 and, other supporting documents and external plans and strategies.

5.3 The main body of the strategy identifies the challenges faced in rural areas of the county including: population forecasts, multiple deprivation, car ownership, travel patterns, accessibility to services, equestrians, carbon emissions, air quality, freight, bus services and community transport. Each section will highlight the challenges and include the LTP4 policy/policies which seek to address that challenge.
5.4 The strategy also includes content on how improvements in technology can benefit rural areas such as demand responsive transport, shared mobility and mobility as a service. Technological advances which could benefit rural areas in the future are also explored such as electric and autonomous vehicles, and digital connectivity in the county which could reduce the need to travel and increase accessibility. The strategy typically includes an overview of LTP funding, monitoring and environmental assessment chapters.

6. **Consultation and Actions**

6.1 As well as being circulated to colleagues in Hertfordshire County Council for comment, the draft Rural Transport Strategy was sent to District, Borough, Town and Parish Councils for their feedback between 23 May 2019 and 4 July 2019. Detailed responses were received from;

- Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council
- East Herts District Council
- North Herts District Council
- Colney Heath Parish Council

Verbal acknowledgement was also received from Watford Borough Council and St Albans City Council who raised no issues. Responses regarding the general content, research conducted, and data included in the strategy were generally well received however, some key issues were highlighted as listed in section 6.3.

6.2 Subsequent discussions were held internally and with East Herts District Council (who initially objected to the omission of specific policies, schemes and funding) on 2 August 2019.

6.3 The key Issues raised from the consultation and the actions taken in accordance following the discussions are as listed in the following table (full list of comments can be found in the appendix b to the report);

<table>
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<th>Key Issues</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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<td>The strategy is currently deficient in respect of inclusion of measures, emerging transport projects or schemes, and funding specifically for rural areas.</td>
<td>The internal review undertaken concluded that developing the Rural Transport Strategy to include specific commitment to rural policies, funding, projects and schemes would prove difficult. Productive discussion with East Herts Council also led to recognition that the inclusion of further policy development and specific schemes and funding would prove difficult.</td>
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<td>Identified that the strategy does not include any specific schemes to rural areas. It also points out that while Growth and Transport Plans (geographical supporting strategies of the LTP4) do border and cross over into rural areas, they are mainly focussed on urban areas and do not include vast areas of the county.</td>
<td>It was suggested that further analysis might be completed in future to list specific Integrated Transport Programme (ITP) schemes completed in rural areas and, indicate future works.</td>
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<td>The strategy should build on or develop the current more generic LTP4 policies to target rural areas. This issue indicates that while some LTP4 policies do specifically mention rural issues, some could be developed further to focus more on rural areas as they tend to cover countywide issues or are perceived to be mainly focussed on urban issues.</td>
<td>While the LTP policies aim to influence rural areas in the county and the Rural Transport Strategy highlights this, it is acknowledged that there is not a specific rural policy, specific rural schemes or funding in particular for the lowest populated rural areas and those who have very little or no sustainable transport choices. Therefore, a study will be conducted in October 2019 which will research best practises regarding rural sustainable transport schemes and policies which have been, or will be implemented in other areas nationally, and how these methodologies and options could possibly be implemented in Hertfordshire. This will be published as a supportive document to the Rural Transport Strategy.</td>
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<td>The strategy fails to offer any cost or budgetary implications to the issues identified. The strategy does not explain how HCC intend to fund rural transport schemes and measures outside of Growth and Transport Plan areas or provide any specific</td>
<td>East Herts Council recommended that the strategy could further expand on the fact that ITP schemes and the funding for this includes rural areas, and that the council will support and encourage transport in rural areas not covered by Growth and Transport Plans for sustainable and innovation transport solutions. A new section to be drafted into the strategy (chapter 7) which covers HCC’s ‘overall approach’. East Herts welcomed the new chapter and agreed that the new chapter</td>
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detail regarding innovative funding mechanisms that HCC will use with partners to address funding shortages.

| detail regarding innovative funding mechanisms that HCC will use with partners to address funding shortages. | encompasses the issues and areas of concern and which were discussed in the meeting. It was also requested that a statement be included as part of the opening sections of the strategy which could be used as a ‘hook’ to strengthen the District/Boroughs’ position when in negotiations with developers. This was acknowledged and a new section (section 1.3) was added to the strategy named ‘Rural Transport Statement’. |

7. **Next Steps**

7.1 Following the Panel’s consideration of the Rural Transport Strategy 2019, it will be published to the Hertfordshire County Council Transport Planning and LTP4 webpages.

8. **Financial Implications**

8.1 The financial costs of producing the Rural Transport Strategy were met by existing budgets.

8.2 The County Council spends both Capital funds (to acquire or improve an asset), and revenue funds (for day to day services) on transport in Hertfordshire and will also seek other funding sources to ensure delivery of interventions.

8.3 The Rural Transport Strategy is a supporting document to the LTP4 and does not include any new schemes. It supports the LTP4 in being aspirational rather than a commitment and schemes are only progressed as funding becomes available. This majority of this tends to come from third parties (grants, Section 106 etc.). Where contributions are required from the County Council they are bid for as part of the Integrated Plan.

9. **Strategic Assessments**

9.1 The LTP4 has been informed by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA). The undertaking of a SEA on any plans that are likely to have a significant effect on the environment is a legal requirement (EU directive). There is also a legal requirement to undertake an HRA on the LTP4.
The Rural Transport Plan does not require a review or update of the strategic assessments as it is a supporting document to the LTP4 which does not include any new schemes.

10. **Equality Implications**

10.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of and have themselves rigorously considered the equalities implications of the decision that they are taking.

10.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure that proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council’s statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

10.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

10.4 An EqIA has been completed for this Rural Transport Strategy and minimal equality impacts have been identified. There are a number of ways that positive actions can lead to an improvement in services to rural residents which can be found in the full EqIA (appendix C to the report).

11. **Appendices**

   - **Appendix A**
     Draft Rural Transport Strategy 2019
   - **Appendix B**
     Full list of consultation comments
   - **Appendix C**
     Equalities Impact Assessment

**Background Information:**
Local Transport Plan 4:
environment/planning-in-hertfordshire/transport-planning/local-transport-plan.aspx

Environment, Planning & Transport Cabinet Panel - 24 April 2018:
https://democracy.hertfordshire.gov.uk/CeListDocuments.aspx?CommitteeId=236&MeetingId=670&DF=24%2f04%2f2018&Ver=2

Rural Transport Policy 2012: