

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet
Date: 13 December 2022
Subject: Place Portfolio
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Nigel Bedford

Recommending:

That the report of the Place Portfolio Holder be noted.

1. Local Plan progress update

The Council, in conjunction with the Plan Inspector, has finalised the proposed further Main Modifications that it considers are required to the Local Plan in order to meet the tests of soundness. Consultation on the further Main Modifications commenced on 28 October 2022 and will conclude on 09 December. It is essential that the scope of this further consultation is effectively communicated. Representations are invited only upon the further Main Modifications and supporting documents to the further Main Modifications. Respondents should not re-submit previous representations or make representations on Main Modifications that have not changed, and any such responses will not be considered by the Inspector.

Reflecting that the Council is keen to move towards the conclusion of the Examination and the final adoption of the Plan as soon as possible at the beginning of 2023, it will collate and share all representations with the Planning Inspector as swiftly as possible following the consultation. Once the Inspector has considered the responses, including the evidence presented throughout the duration of the Examination, he will determine whether the Local Plan is 'sound' and produce a written report outlining his final recommendations. Following receipt of the Inspector's report and providing he determines it 'sound', the Plan can be formally adopted by the Council if it makes all the Main Modifications.

2. Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT)

The HGGT aims to coordinate and enable delivery of 16,000 homes by 2033, along with associated infrastructure, delivering the Garden Town Vision, principles and guidance that has been agreed by the 5 partner councils. 3,900 of these homes are allocated within Epping Forest District, making up over a third of the district's allocated housing.

EFDC officers continue to liaise with key stakeholders across the five Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) authorities and relevant site promoters. This is undertaken in the context of wider Garden Town activities. Key updates in terms of the Garden Town are:

- The draft Latton Priory Strategic Masterplan Framework is currently being publicly consulted upon running from 17th October to the 9th January 2023. For full information, or to comment or complete a questionnaire on the masterplan, you can visit the website www.lattonpriory.co.uk. Hard copies of the draft SMF and questionnaire are also available at the Civic Offices reception.

- The Garden Town team is progressing work on the STC Connector Route Studies, for Water Lane, Latton Priory and East of Harlow. The updated HGGT Infrastructure Delivery Plan is in the fact-checking process, and the draft HGGT Green Infrastructure Framework is progressing to be endorsed by the HGGT Board early in 2023.
- Harlow & Gilston Garden Town was a winner at the 2022 Essex Housing Awards, for the HGGT Transport Strategy. The event saw the partnership of five local councils take the award in the Building Garden Communities category for the best new or planned Garden Communities from design to construction, including zero carbon. The partnership's HGGT Transport Strategy focuses on healthier and more sustainable movement around the Garden Town, shortening journey times, improving public transport and enhancing walking and cycling routes.
- The Garden Town team has recently completed the Your Quality of Life consultation and is in the process of analysis and forming recommendations. There were over 7000 visits to the Commonplace platform, 1015 contributions and 553 individual respondents, which is a significant increase to previous consultations. The Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) funded this digital engagement and have been impressed by the scale and ambition of the project, which was also recently shortlisted for an Archiboo Award 2022 for Best Digital Engagement.
- The HGGT Online Travel Survey is live from 7th November to 4th December. This aims to get a more detailed understanding of how people of all ages and abilities move around the Garden Town, using different transport modes (e.g. walk, wheel, cycle, drive, bus etc). The request to complete the online travel survey has been sent out via letters to 10,000 homes across the Garden Town area.

3. Sustainable Transport

DaRT87 Demand Responsive Transport

Flexiroute Passenger app further delayed which continues to make recovery from pandemic aftermath very difficult. Targeted online activity and press release are all ready to go via EFDC, HGGT and Harlow Council comms once the app is ready. ECC confirms bus patronage is still depressed due to lack of 'traditional' 5 day per week commuting and concessionary passholder caution about public transport. Across all their service types (dial-a-ride, NHS, ECC contracted scheduled services, DaRT87), passengers carried by Epping Forest Community Transport (EFCT) have fallen from 100k per year pre-pandemic to around 35k in the last year.

Marketing leaflet produced at low cost aimed at lower tech audiences - Epping High Street stall on market day in October; distribution at Civic Hub via partners like Citizens Advice and DWP; article in Housing quarterly resident magazine; distribution at Epping and Harlow/Great Parndon libraries.

Exploratory meeting held with ECC to look at options from next April to include EFCT running some additional timetabled services on behalf of Vectare & ECC over the similar 31 routing (Western Harlow - Roydon – Epping Green – Epping/Coopersale). DaRT87 has proven demand exists from SW Harlow and Epping Green to reach Epping town and tube station so this may be a pragmatic option to consider next year. Harlow Council continue not to contribute directly to the service despite their residents benefitting from it.

EV Adoption and Public Charging

Government/DfT stats continue to give a mixed picture on the EV market locally. On the one hand at Q2/22 the EFDC area had the largest number of battery only EVs (BEV) on the roads of any Essex district at 1,330, up 73% on Q2/21. On the other hand, Essex and EFDC both lag at about half the all-England average for public EV chargers per 100k population. At end July 22 there were 34 chargers in EFDC area (now +4 with the Epping Tesco chargers). At least one third of local homes have no off-street parking, so if this continues, it will impose a ceiling on EV adoption. Taking into account EFDC's plans and known private chargers in the pipeline, the number of public chargers should at least double by the end of 2023 – this excludes the Qualis multi-storey car park in Epping and any ECC on-street charging trials.

Instavolt chargers at Oakwood Hill East continue to be well used with good user reactions and an uplift in parking revenues. A further four Instavolt chargers at Basons Lane car park, Ongar (an EV charging 'not-spot') and Debden are likely this year or early 2023. Ongar Business Centre (co-working/start-up business site) have been lobbying for public chargers in the town as they count 17 EV/PHEV users among their clients.

The cost of public EV charging has started to become a bigger concern recently, with two of Instavolt's rapid/ultra-rapid network competitors reaching the £1 per kWh level and most of the other networks including Instavolt raising headline prices by up to 50% over the last year and/or introducing fixed monthly charges in order to get best tariffs. Public confidence in the ongoing running cost benefits of EV versus petrol/diesel seems strong for now, but the recent Budget introduces VED ('road tax') for EVs from 2025 including EV commercial vehicles and any sustained reduction in petrol or diesel costs could delay adoption on a larger scale.

Workplace chargers for staff and clients/customers/visitors are something we wish to stimulate via a campaign in the Business Matters newsletter and other business to business engagement. This would feature a deal being worked out with a major supplier to multi-site businesses starting with a professional needs and technical assessment of sites and then a discount on installation and equipment. Government grants still exist for workplaces and also for landlords and flat leaseholders, subject to viability, but no longer to homeowners with off street parking.

UKSP Funded options

Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Waltham Abbey still being explored – discussions with Broxbourne Council have started to ensure mutual benefits are identified across both councils' LCWIPs (for example east-west cross border active travel needs for employment/commuting, shopping/leisure and education). Rural England Prosperity Fund options and candidate identification has further proved demand exists for rural energy saving, generation and EV charging in key rural hubs like village halls, small business hubs and the visitor economy.