

Planning Policy, Local Plan and Infrastructure Lead Member Update December 2023

Local Plan

Public consultation on the latest Regulation 18 closes on 10th Dec (midnight). By the time of Full Council I will have attended, presented and answered questions at every area forum. I was also pleased to be invited and lead on this at the public meeting arranged by 'Save Our Green Spaces' at which well over 100 residents were present and rightly asked challenging questions. I thank the group for their efforts in not only pushing the consultation with a separate leaflet from the Council's but inviting myself and the Council Leader along to this meeting.

I hope everyone has seen the excellent video with Marko Kalik encouraging people to respond to the Local Plan. It appears to have been a great hit on social media!

I am pleased that the plan appears to be receiving widespread support especially from the various residents associations which have emailed their members urging Yes votes for questions 1, 3 and 5. When independent groups email their members saying "Overall, we strongly support the proposed Plan, it achieves a good balance between providing new homes for local people with protecting Green Belt.* I know we have done the right approach on this.

The final stage of the Local Plan process is Examination by a Government Planning Inspector and as its stated *Clear support from local residents in this Reg18 consultation carries weight with the Inspector*, makes it more likely the Inspector will approve it.

In that regard to note also have the backing for the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England in their statement dated 16th November is also good news. They do however suggest we should try to increase further the density of Brownfield development sites and not reject any!

The updates to the Local Housing Needs Assessment and Economic Study are nearing completion. We will then need to look into what effect this will have on our local plan policies. We will then begin work on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Whole Plan Viability Study, Energy Efficiency Study, transport work and updating our Gypsy and Traveller study.

Other Planning

We are still waiting for the final report from DLUHC on our Article 4 Direction. They have been in contact confirming they are working on it, though they should have come back to us by September. Once received Officers will make any necessary amendments and bring a report to confirm the Article 4 Direction at a future P&R committee.

The Sarratt appeal public inquiry for the planning application for the residential scheme (83 dwellings) (and doctor's surgery) at land rear of Church Lane is now closed and a decision is expected in the new year. The applicant did not make an application for award of costs.

Major planning applications for the data centre in Abbots Langley and the film studio proposals in Langleybury are now expected to come to Planning Committee in January 2024.

New planning fees are to be introduced from 6 December 2023. These are nationally set fees, increasing major applications by 35% and others by 25%.

The application process for CIL applications opens in January 2024.

A mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain will be a mandatory requirement on all applications from January 2024, and on other applications from April. The Biodiversity Net Gain guidance was published on 29th November 2023 and officers are working through the implications for the District.

We have received a neighbouring planning authority notification regarding Broadwater Lake in Hillingdon as its close to Three Rivers. Officers have expressed concern in respect of the impact of this on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and have so advised Hillingdon. We have asked Herts Ecology to give comments as they are the experts.

Infrastructure

I have had meetings with Watford Borough Council, along with the leader on the expansion of the Beryl Bikes scheme to the Croxley area and a report has now been presented to Policy & Resources on this re its funding.

I have had further meetings with both HCC, Watford and the consultants working on the Watford to Croxley Link (W2CL) project which is the successor to the discontinued Met Line Extension. A meeting with ward members in Croxley is to take place before council to update them,.

The basis of the scheme is to increase the capacity of the transport network with the Watford and Three Rivers area and to improve journey times. A multi- criteria appraisal assessment has been taken on a long list of possible transport modes resulting in now a short list for continued assessment and in-depth cost of building and running a new system. Whilst there is still much work not least on the routing in Watford to Watford Junction it appears that a Trackless Tram system not only offers best value for money but better service delivery for residents.

Rickmansworth High Street Project Board

Although all parties have unanimously agreed to a hybrid opening with closure only at weekends I and I have chased Herts County Council on this I am disappointed to say they have advised that due to the complexity and legality of putting the correct Traffic Regulation Orders and signing in place the timescale for the road - reopening is now likely to be mid February.

In any event due to the weekend working arrangements of TRDC at Xmas and New Year we will not be shutting it these weekends.