

## MINUTES OF MEETING - HITCHIN TOWN ACTION GROUP (HTAG) REPRESENTATIVES

2 DECEMBER 2019/ 2.30PM @ HITCHIN PRIORY

### ATTENDEES:

Ellie Clarke (EC)	Hitchin Forum
Brian Sykes (BS)	Hitchin Forum
Chris Honey (CH)	Hitchin Forum
Neil Dodds (ND)	Hitchin Forum
Dave Borner (DB)	Hitchin Forum
Bill Sellicks (BSell)	Hitchin Forum
Jane Arnold (JA)	Hitchin Society
Phil Davis (PD)	Hitchin Society
David Howlett (DH)	Hitchin Historical Society
Simon Walker (SW)	Hitchin Historical Society
Tom Allington (TA)	North Hertfordshire District Council Planning Officer
Chris McTague (CMcT)	Gallagher Developments
Lee Butler (LB)	Bellcross Homes
Jason Lowes (JL)	Rapleys
Chloe Ballantine (CB)	Rapleys

1.	INTRODUCTIONS	ACTION
1.1	All attendees introduced themselves.	
1.2	JL explained the purpose of the meeting was to provide the HTAG representatives with a planning update on Bellcross' application in light of their previously submitted comments on the scheme prior to submission and during the formal consultation process. This was welcomed by the HTAG representatives.	
1.3	It was also acknowledged that joint local plan representations were submitted by HTAG representatives regarding the site's policy allocation.	

2.	GALLAGHER'S INVOLVEMENT	ACTION
2.1	CMcT and LB provided the HTAG representatives with a background to Gallagher's involvement in working with Bellcross to assist in running the planning application and brining the site to market as soon as possible.	
2.2	CMcT advised that there were ongoing initial discussions being held with several established national housebuilders.	
3.	SCHEME BACKGROUND/PROGRESS UPDATE	ACTION
3.1	<p>JL provided a background overview in respect of the planning application as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The site's continued promotion for residential development in the emerging local plan process, resulting in a strategic site allocation representing 5% of the District's overall housing supply during the plan period.</li> <li>Pre-application engagement with North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) Officers, statutory/non-statutory consultees, Hertfordshire Design Review Panel and two public exhibitions held in June 2017.</li> <li>Formal submission of the original application back in April 2018.</li> <li>On-going monitoring of consultation responses to inform any necessary scheme amendments, with the key statutory consultee raising no objection, or comments that are capable of a resolution.</li> </ul>	
3.2	<p>JL talked through the following key changes to the scheme with the HTAG representatives, which he advised responded to consultation feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adjustments to the land take required to the primary school.</li> <li>Following comments from Sport England, previously proposed sports pitches have been converted to grassland open space, and a financial contribution will be made towards improvements of off-site facilities.</li> <li>Exploring net biodiversity gain opportunities on-site.</li> <li>Sensitive consideration given to the scheme's interface with Highover Farm (notably the Grade II listed Threshing Barn) and its setting.</li> <li>Exploring options for further sustainable modes of transport.</li> <li>Reviewing the proposed street hierarchy and road design following Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) feedback.</li> </ul>	
3.3	JL advised that these key changes would shortly be addressed in a supplemental/ re-submission package to be submitted to NHDC before Christmas.	
4.	TIMESCALES FOR DETERMINATION	ACTION
4.1	TA provided the HTAG representatives with an update on NHDC's correspondence with the Local Plan Inspector and Counsel's advice cautioning against NHDC determining any Green Belt applications ahead of the emerging Local Plan being adopted.	
4.2	TA confirmed that the Inspector's fundamental issues raised relating to the Green Belt did not apply to the site's policy allocation. Rather, as TA clarified, the Inspector is now only concerned with those development sites whose contribution to the Green Belt have changed following NHDC's updated Green Belt Review.	

4.3	TA advised that any further hearing sessions would hopefully take place in March 2020 after which timescales for determining the application can be re-visited.	
4.4	CMcT, LB and JL stated that given the local authority's lack of housing supply, they considered that NHDC can determine the application by April 2020, in advance of the Local Plan being adopted. It was further discussed that this would in turn assist NHDC in resisting any speculative applications on un-allocated sites as a result of the Local Plan delay, which TA and the HTAG representatives recognised.	

5.	Q & A SESSION - BY TOPIC	ACTION
	<u>GREEN BELT</u>	
5.1	The HTAG representatives asked why NHDC have allocated the site for development in their emerging Local Plan when the site has already been identified by NHDC as making a 'significant' contribution to the Green Belt.	
5.2	TA explained that in order to meet the District's housing needs, a number of Green Belt sites have been identified with the emerging Local Plan, none of which have been found to have a "limited" impact on the Green Belt. He advised the HTAG representatives that NHDC's Green Belt evidence base is available on NHDC's website.	
5.3	Further, TA commented that NHDC's latest Annual Monitoring Report shortly to be published, confirms that NHDC are only able to demonstrate 1.3 years supply of housing, which increases the risk of unplanned development now being pursued via speculative applications.	
5.4	At this point, JL highlighted that unlike many of the other allocated sites, Bellcross' site falls under a single ownership making it available and deliverable now and that great care has been taken to ensure in particular that the undeveloped separation gap between the settlements of Hitchin and Letchworth is maintained by the scheme.	
	<u>HOUSING MIX</u>	
5.6	JA queried why locally based housing mixes could not be applied to new schemes instead of a District-wide mix. TA explained that NHDC's starting point for determining a scheme's housing mix is their latest Strategic Housing Market Assessment.	
5.7	CMcT advised that due consideration had to be given to local market conditions and housebuilders' requirements. He did however comment that the scheme's current housing mix is largely in line with the consultation feedback received from the NHDC Housing Officer, and that he would be happy to circulate the scheme's indicative housing mix.	<u>POST MEETING ACTION:</u> an Indicative Housing Mix is now available to view online on the Council's planning application page - LPA Ref: 18/01154/OP.
	<u>AFFORDABLE HOUSING</u>	
5.8	The HTAG representatives queried the proportion of affordable housing to be provided and how it would be integrated within the scheme.	
5.9	CMcT confirmed that in line with emerging policy and NHDC Housing Officer's consultation feedback, 40% on-site affordable provision is proposed comprising 65% social and 35% intermediate, amounting to 280 affordable units in total. JA queried whether this provision would include social housing/rent. CMcT advised that the mix	

	remains subject to on-going discussions.	
5.10	CMcT explained that the affordable housing units would be scattered throughout the site as far as possible, albeit allowing for the requirements of the registered housing provider(s) to be met.	
	<u>DESIGN STANDARDS</u>	
5.11	EC asked how the design quality of housing will be secured. CMcT confirmed that any housebuilder would be required to comply with the statutory building regulations, which set the minimum standards for design and construction and that this would be overseen by the local authority's or NHBC building control department/Approved Inspector.	
	<u>TRANSPORT/HIGHWAYS</u>	
5.12	<u>Access</u> - JL explained the High Dane access arrangements to the HTAG representatives and advised that these arrangements had been informed by HCC pre-application feedback and residents' concerns raised at the public exhibition for a potential 'rat-run' being created through the site. JL confirmed that there would be a bus gate arrangement in place to permit only bus/emergency vehicle access to continue travelling through the site beyond the neighbourhood facilities/primary school.	
5.13	<u>Road and Pedestrian Safety/Capacity</u> - BSell queried why "urban modelling" assumptions had been applied to Stotfold Road in the Transport Assessment. CMcT advised that HCC's strategic model, which has been used to inform and support NHDC's emerging Local Plan, has been utilised in agreement with HCC.	
5.14	BSell further sought clarification in respect of AADT data consistency contained within the TA (at appendix 13.2) in terms of delay times and additional vehicles. CMcT confirmed that he would investigate this and come back to BSell.	<u>POST-MEETING NOTE:</u> transport consultant's advice issued to BSell 08/01/20 by CB.
5.15	The HTAG representatives queried how road safety along Stotfold Road would be addressed by the scheme. CMcT explained that it has now been agreed with HC that extended 30 mph sections either side of the new proposed roundabout on Stotfold Road will be provided in order to slow traffic. This was welcomed by the HTAG representatives.	
5.16	The HTAG representatives highlighted several junctions with existing capacity issues including Stotfold Road/Cambridge Road (A505) and Grove Road/Woolgrove Road and raised concerns for pedestrian/cycle safety via the rail bridge towards Hitchin station. HCC's 2017 feasibility transport study for the Hitchin Industrial Area and an alternative route for a new link road from Stotfold Road to the industrial estate was also discussed and noted.	
5.17	CMcT explained that as the highway authority, it is HCC's role to advise on where off-site improvements and financial contributions from new development should be directed towards. He did however advise that traffic flows for junction modelling have been obtained from HCC's strategic model, and that HCC were not seeking any off-site junction improvements from this scheme.	
5.18	The HTAG representatives queried what traffic impact would be generated by the new primary school. JL and CMcT explained that the new school shall primarily serve the future needs of the development and as such any traffic increase would be negligible, with suitable parking control restrictions to be applied.	
5.19	<u>Sustainable Transport Measures</u> - CMcT confirmed that the Travel Plan submitted as part of the application would be implemented via planning condition with measures	

	including a welcome pack for residents, the promotion of public transport information, car-sharing, and travel vouchers. He also advised that a Construction Environmental Management Plan would be subject to a planning condition in order to secure details of construction vehicle routes and control restrictions prior to the construction phase commencing.	
5.20	CMcT confirmed that following discussions with local bus service Centrebus, it had been agreed that a new extended bus route would serve the site via High Dane through to Stotfold Road to ensure it is within acceptable walking distances for future residents.	
5.21	JA asked how many years this extended bus route would be guaranteed for. CMcT said he would confirm and let her know.	<u>POST MEETING NOTE:</u> a new bus service would be subsidised for five years (CMcT)
5.22	CMcT advised the HTAG representatives that discussions were on-going with HCC with regards to on/off-site works and improvements and financial contributions, which the HTAG representatives acknowledged.	
	<u>HIGHOVER FARM</u>	
5.23	The HTAG representatives queried the status of Highover Farm and what plans there were for it.	
5.24	LB confirmed that Bellcross owned Highover Farm which is currently occupied by a farmer tenant, and that in the future, the farm site could be available for a separate part re-development/conversion scheme. This was noted by the HTAG representatives.	

The meeting closed at 4.30pm.