

North Herts District Council Local Plan–Timeline for Response to Council’s Request for Strategic Housing Land

Land to the North of the Grange, Letchworth Garden City

Introduction

As part of central government planning policy, each local authority is required to make suitable provision for housing, including a longer term strategy and a 5 year supply of land.

The National Planning Policy Framework, which is the government’s main planning policy document, sets out the criteria that should be used to determine how much land should be allocated, in order to meet housing need.

North Herts District Council’s Local Plan dates back to 1996, which means that the Council is required to update its policies and ensure that sufficient housing land supply is provided.

In 2008, North Herts District Council published their initial thoughts on how much housing should be provided and where, in order to meet regional requirements set out in the East of England Plan. In 2009 a consultation document was published indicating the options where this housing could be provided. This included 6,200 new homes in North Hertfordshire from 2001 to 2021. This did not include the land to the north of the Grange, but did include land to the west of Western Way and other sites in Letchworth of under 1,000 homes, known as non-strategic sites.

Following the abolition of the East of England Plan and the publication of the government’s National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012, it became apparent to the Council that they needed to revise the methodology used to calculate the number of homes required in their previous consultation plan.

A figure of 10,700 homes was subsequently agreed for North Hertfordshire in 2012 by the Council for the period between 2011 and 2031.

In order to meet this increased requirement, the Council had to consider further sites of 1,000 homes or more, known as strategic sites. This resulted in an approach made to landowners in November 2012 and the following actions set out below.

The programme for these actions is defined by the Council’s requirement to have a new Local Plan and the dates included in the NHDC Local Development Scheme, which is a standard document used by local authorities to set out timelines for various adopted planning policy documents.

2nd November 2012 - NHDC Call for Sites Letter

Following the decision by NHDC regarding the number of houses required, a letter was sent by NHDC to major landowners requesting confirmation of land available for strategic sites for housing development. This required a response by 16th November 2012.

In response to this, the Heritage Foundation reviewed possible housing locations, should it be agreed that land should be provided in Letchworth to meet this requirement. Land that has previously been developed, known as brownfield land, was considered and it was felt that the potential re-development sites, such as at Birds Hill and Blackhorse Road, could be recommended to the Board for inclusion. No other suitable locations which could come forward in the Council's timescales and meet their site size requirements were found, which would not prejudice the viability of Letchworth's local economy.

A search for strategic sites on land that has not been previously developed, known as green field land, was then undertaken within the Council's time line, and it became apparent that there a number of constraints on possible locations.

Council Officers indicated that they would not be supportive of any possible land allocations which may co-join Letchworth with Baldock or Hitchin, which meant that possible strategic sites to the east and west of the town could not be considered. To the south of the town, there are constraints arising from existing uses and the planning of the 1970s and 1980s then green field developments of the Lordship and Manor park estates, which were carefully formulated to protect the identity of Willian.

This led to consideration of land to the north of the town and a possible linking to the area adjacent to Western Way, which was previously suggested by the Council in their earlier consultation document.

13th November 2012 – Board of Management meeting

Sites highlighted by the Council as non-strategic sites were re-considered and with the exception of Green Belt land at Croft Lane, support by the Heritage Foundation for these was confirmed.

The land to the north of the Grange was discussed and it was agreed that this could be considered for housing, but that the Heritage Foundation would review its position following the Council's statutory consultation exercise.

Letter sent 15th November 2012, confirming the Heritage Foundation's position.

February and March 2013 – North Herts District Council Consultation

NHDC's statutory consultation exercise on housing options across the District, which included the land to the north of the Grange, took place throughout February and March.

21st March 2013 – Governors' Meeting

At the Heritage Foundation's Governors' meeting, the latest position regarding the Local Plan and possible housing sites was explained to the Governors for information.

The Governors indicated that there is a need for more affordable housing and a range of homes that reflect the demographic of the town.

21st May 2013 – Garden City Meeting

At the Garden City meeting, there was a presentation on the possibility that the land to the north of the Grange may be developed, as part of a new NHDC Local Plan.

At this meeting, it was stated that this is a difficult decision for the Heritage Foundation as landowner and that we would need the help of the local community to decide whether we should allow the Council to consider this.

It was agreed at the meeting that a community engagement process would be undertaken, before the Heritage Foundation confirms its position as landowner to the decision making body, the NHDC.

July 2013 – NHDC Publish Additional Local Plan Background Papers

Papers published by NHDC on strategic transport and a landscape assessment.

August 2013 – NHDC Publish Council's consultation results

The results from the February and March consultation exercise undertaken by the Council was published by NHDC.

10th September 2013 – Board of Management meeting

The results of the statutory consultation was considered at this meeting.

The Board agreed that the position set out in November 2012 remains and further consideration of the land to the north of the Grange is necessary, the results of which will be reported to the December 2013 Board.

This was confirmed to NHDC by letter dated 25th September 2013.

12th November 2013 – Board of Management meeting

At this meeting the arrangements for the community engagement exercise, were discussed and agreed.

18th November – 29th November – Town Wide Dialogue

An exhibition was held at the Hub and facilitated by the University of Hertfordshire and its consultant team. To help inform the debate the following reports were also published:

- Socio Economics
- Flooding and Hydrology
- Transport
- Ecology

Each of the reports was made available at the Exhibition.

The Exhibition followed a mail drop to every address in Letchworth Garden City. It was also advertised using local and social media.

It included panels on: the process, background on Letchworth Garden City; Garden City principles; road and traffic; wildlife and the environment; flood risk, people;

public, services and jobs; the land to the north of the Grange; the decision making process; our approach to new homes; and income reinvested back into the town.

In order to examine key issues raised during the Council's statutory consultation, there was also the following specialist sessions:

- 21st November – Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners – Socio Economics
- 25th November – Cascade – Biodiversity
- 27th November – Cascade – Flooding and Hydrology
- 28th November – Cottee Transport Planning – Transport

There were 673 visitors to the Exhibition and 157 comment cards filled out and returned. 97 email comments were received, 58 on line comments, 136 Facebook comments and 5 letters.

At the same an online market research exercise was undertaken, with 309 local residents involved in the quantitative research and 40 in the qualitative exercise.

Comments were also invited via social media, email, a dedicated web site and in writing.

Petitions were also presented on behalf of local residents, which was both signed by hand and via an online petition.

4th December 2013 – Governors' Meeting

The results of the Exhibition were presented by the University of Hertfordshire team and the market research company.

The exhibition material was also provided and representatives from the consultant team were available to deal with any queries.

A discussion facilitated by the University representative took place, which focussed on the compatibility of the possible development with Garden City principles.

The Governors voted 9 to 4 in favour of the proposition that the development of the land to the north of the Grange should be supported.

10th December 2013 – Board Meeting

Prior to the meeting, the Board received a summary of the community engagement process produced by the University of Hertfordshire, which captured the comments arising from the Exhibition and town wide dialogue, to assist them in their consideration of this matter.

Following this review, the Board was requested to determine its views on whether this land should be included as part of the Council's deliberations of possible sites to meet its housing requirements.

The Board unanimously agreed to put forward land North of the Grange for inclusion in the next stage of the Local Plan process and that the Heritage Foundation's position is confirmed to North Herts District Council, who will then use this

information as part of its review of potential sites, prior to its publication of its draft Local Plan for consultation purposes, early in 2014.

The Chairman concluded that should the development of this site move forward the Trustees would ensure that it was delivered in a way that the town would be proud of, ensuring that the Garden City Principles are adhered to if the site should be allocated for development within NHDC's Local Plan.

This was confirmed to NHDC by letter dated 11th December 2013 and a press statement released. The Heritage Foundation's Chief Executive did a series of interviews with the local press and the decision was published online.

A member of the local group opposed to the development was contacted direct and this group was invited to meet the Chief Executive, to discuss the decision, but to date this has not been taken up.

The report by the University of Hertfordshire was subsequently published on line, including a summary of the process and representations received, along with the notes from the Governors' meeting.

December 2014/January 2015 – North Herts District Council Consultation

The draft Local Plan, which includes a whole raft of policies covering a wide range of areas, including how the District's housing requirements should be met in the period 2011 to 2031, was the subject of a statutory public consultation exercise led by the Council, from 18th December 2014 to 6th February 2015.

This showed the provision of 14,200 dwellings in the period of 2011 to 2031 and does include a number of potential housing sites in Letchworth, including the land to the north of the Grange Estate.

October/November 2016 – Submission Plan Consultation

Following the previous consultation, the Council agreed a final Submission Plan, which was the subject of a formal consultation exercise.

This plan includes the full raft of strategic and development management policies, covering a wide range of topic areas such as housing, employment, town centres and retail, transport, design and natural and historic environment.

The plan was the subject of a public consultation exercise, which ended on 30th November 2016.

This plan can be viewed at: <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/Proposed%20Submission%20Local%20Plan.pdf>

The Heritage Foundation made representations to this plan and in support of these comments background papers on local housing and an updated economic assessment were produced.

Next Steps

North Herts District Council

Following the close of the consultation, the Council will now consider all of the responses received and then decide whether to send the plan to the Government for examination. Should this be the case, the current programme shows an Independent Examination by an Inspector representing the Secretary of State late Summer 2017.

Information on this process can be found at <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/proposed-submission-local-plan-2011-2031>

Heritage Foundation

Following submission of representations to the most recent stage of the consultation, the Heritage Foundation will be undertaking the following in 2017:

- Commence the planning of brown field development sites identified in the Proposed Submission Plan, with a view that where possible and appropriate these are brought forward.

With respect to the land to the north of Letchworth Garden City:-

- Identify key issues including highways, transport and access and start to review these matters in more detail;
- Agree a set of core values and principles, which will then lead how the development of this land will proceed;
- Commence the process, which will result in the appointment of an appropriate partner to help bring forward this development, should it become adopted policy, in line with these values and principles;
- Commence discussions with the local community and town as a whole regarding the development of this land; and
- Instigate dialogue with stakeholders, such as the District and County Councils regarding the key components of the development of this site.