

STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE DELIVERY GROUP

BACKGROUND NOTES BY SIMON SMITH, EELGA PEER REVIEW GROUP

1. Requirements

1.1 A Local Plan is a coin with two sides, on one side, the Local Plan and the other side, evidence that addresses the Local Plan delivery challenge. The latter needs to demonstrate certainty over the timely delivery of identified requirements for strategic and site-specific physical infrastructure, utilities, public services, and amenities.

1.2 The Inspectors' main concerns with the withdrawn submitted Local Plan highlighted uncertainty over funding for and timely delivery of investment in strategic highway and public transport infrastructure.

1.3 The lesson to learn is simply this, a sound Local Plan comprises both a justified spatial strategy to meet identified needs and evidence to demonstrate there is a reasonable prospect of planned infrastructure being delivered in a timely manner.

1.4 To ensure the new Local Plan is built on sound foundations, it is essential the Council considers practice from neighbouring authorities and how such practice could be adopted and applied.

1.5 To help overcome the delivery challenges faced by the Local Plan system, the Hertfordshire Growth Board has been established by the ten Hertfordshire districts, the County Council and the LEP. The objective is to secure Government support to put 'infrastructure in first' ahead of development, reduce the County's carbon footprint and plan for active and sustainable transport. The requirements amount to £5.7bn of infrastructure to support delivery of 100,000 new dwellings and 100,000 new jobs by 2031. The 11 local authorities have established the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP). Its remit is to support outcomes identified by the Growth Board and work with Hertfordshire Forward, Herts LEP, the Local Transport Body for Hertfordshire, the Local Nature Partnership and others on infrastructure and planning issues of common concern.

1.6 The case of Cambridgeshire shows how innovations in governance enable individual Councils to address collectively sub regional and regional planning issues and secure funding for required infrastructure in support of strategic planned growth. In Cambridgeshire, Cambridgeshire Horizons was formed with £25m of Government funding to unlock planned development sites. This organisation was abolished to make way for the Local Enterprise Partnership, which has been absorbed by the Combined Authority and its Devolution Deal. In parallel, the Greater Cambridge Partnership secured and is steering by the Cambridge sub region City Deal. The County is part of the informal Oxford Cambridge Arc, a legacy initiative of three former Regional Development Agencies to promote the arc's knowledge economy assets. In 2017 it was the subject of a National Infrastructure Commission report that calculated the economic impact of doubling house building rates, East-West rail, and Oxford to Cambridge expressway. Further to this report, the England's Economic Heartland Sub-National Transport Body has identified stations along the proposed East-West rail route to support the sustainability of growth points, notably Cambourne in South Cambridgeshire.

1.7 Twenty years ago South Cambridgeshire District Council was in a similar position to Uttlesford District Council today. After years of growth pressures being met through incremental expansion of a 'necklace' of villages, Members representing those villages recognised their communities had had enough and Members representing hitherto protected villages recognised it could be their turn next. South Cambridgeshire evolved a new spatial strategy to provide for a new settlement. Twenty years

on, two new settlements – Cambourne and Northstowe – provide focal points for development. Cambourne has a secondary school and health centre and is to be served by a railway station. Northstowe is served by a guided bus route although it cannot be said to be a show case of place making. The surrounding villages have been protected from the full force of development pressures. These big picture outcomes could not have been delivered by South Cambridgeshire District Council acting alone without the power of multi-agency organisations.

1.8 The Peer Review Team is currently conducting meetings with a view to providing the Council with a report on the current and evolving policy, funding and governance environment for planning, funding, and delivery of strategic infrastructure.

1.9 Without prejudice to this report, the following tentative and preliminary findings can be made:

i) A need for a decisive break from the current Catch 22 to a virtuous circle

Uttlesford is caught in a Catch 22 where uncertainty of funding for infrastructure leads to no Local Plan, no Local Plan precludes certainty over the location of development and hence cases to attract funding for infrastructure and leaves the district exposed to the anarchy of speculative, piece meal and appeal led development

Subject to verification, it has been suggested a Local Planning Authority in Essex is in a virtuous circle where a Local Plan and infrastructure were aligned, planned development was delivered and on the basis of success is able to attract funds to support further growth defined by the democratically elected Council.

ii) A need to engage with the evolving strategic policy and funding environment across multiple boundaries

Uttlesford is located along the boundary of two Sub-National Transport Bodies, England's Economic Heartland and Transport East. The key infrastructure matters are located to the north along the boundaries of four highway authorities (Essex, Suffolk Cambridgeshire) and two infrastructure bodies (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Greater Cambridge Partnership) and to the south two highway authorities (Hertfordshire and Essex) and one infrastructure body (Hertfordshire Growth Board). In Essex it is understood that the County Council is prioritising infrastructure schemes funded by development. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership has a Growth Places fund with five funding priorities including accelerated infrastructure and creating places.

The case of the proposed improvements to the A120 and slip road access to the M11 J8 illustrates the link between complexity and timelines of preparing and funding big ticket infrastructure required to deliver a sound plan. Essex County Council began investigating the scheme in 2015 to meet future network demand from planned developments at Bishop's Stortford, East Herts and Uttlesford and the continued growth of Stansted Airport. Whilst the County Council secured funds from the Government's National Productivity Investment Fund and other sources, the tender prices exceeded the funds available and the scheme has been deferred.

1.10 To build the new Local Plan on sound foundations, it is clear the Council will need to consider new arrangements for engaging with the various local authorities and infrastructure and funding bodies. The purposes being to secure a fundamental pre-condition of a sound Local Plan, co-ordinated planning for and funding of infrastructure first in support of planned development.