

# Agenda item 8

## Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB) – Planning Resilience and Capacity Task and Finish Group, update, and next steps for approval

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### 1 Background

- 1.1 Herts Leaders Group, the Growth Board and Hertfordshire Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (HIPP) have recognised the current challenge of operating an effective and well-resourced pan-Hertfordshire growth delivery and planning system.
- 1.2 All councils are struggling to various extent with staffing and capacity across planning, estates, drainage, and other related specialist service areas that are critical to delivering growth in the county. Through the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Development Board (HIDB) we heard direct industry views that lack of capacity leading to delays at various points on the planning delivery pathway is the biggest cost to them and has the most damaging impact upon the pace of development delivery and certainty. They identified planning capacity as the highest priority issue for them to discuss with Hertfordshire Leaders and senior officers through the HIDB.
- 1.3 The private sector is struggling with recruiting specialist staff as much as local government but has more flexibility to offer higher salaries and other terms and conditions benefits in comparison which is of itself contributing to the flow of experienced planners from local government, especially that are mid-career.
- 1.4 This situation is not new but has worsened in recent years. The interrelationships between a successful economy, functioning housing market, securing net zero, the ability to plan for and deliver necessary infrastructure, the ability to secure well-planned, healthy, sustainable, high quality new development are all contingent on a well-resourced and functioning planning and development system. This has to a degree been recognised by Government through the recent proposals to substantially increase to the current levels of planning application fees.

- 1.5 Recognising this as a priority area, in early 2022 the Growth Board established a Task & Finish Group to look at these issues with representatives from industry, Higher and Further education, and the councils. The chair of HIPP, Cllr Linda Haysey is the political sponsor for this work, with Amanda Foley CEx at St Albans City and District Council the Chief Executive sponsor.
- 1.6 Officers are aware that the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing (DLUHC) is looking at the same issues and a new programme of support and change is planned as part of the Levelling Up Bill. The recent Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill already proposes a number of further changes to the planning system, including changes to development plans and a new infrastructure levy mechanism and increases in the planning fees regime. The Hertfordshire work is of interest to HM Government, and a meeting was held with the DLUHC Leads on this on 5 July 2022.

## **2. Progress to date**

- 2.1 The wider Task & Finish Group has now met twice along with a number of interim sub-group and consulting meetings with the Herts Heads of Planning and HIPP. Baseline survey work has been undertaken to identify existing staff levels, vacancies, workloads, backlogs, skills levels, and any salary issues.
- 2.2 The outputs of the work so far have been to identify a range of short-, medium- and longer-term actions that can be progressed by coalition of willing partners. The draft action plan ideas have been discussed at HIPP. Actions being suggested range from exploration of how joint resources and capacity can be used more effectively, to investment in better training and development to assist with recruitment and retention of key planning and other staff. An important part of the work will be to promote the benefits of planning, as an activity to deliver positive change and important outcomes for communities.
- 2.3 The sector along with Further and Higher Education representatives on the task and finish group have contributed to the development of the action plan including participation on a number of sub-groups being planned to take actions forward.

2.4 Capacity to move agreed actions from the plan into implementation will be critical. The Growth Board will be considering its budget on 20/7 and funding is being asked for to progress this work but on the basis that match funding will also be sought from the sector to help deliver these plans and improvements.

### 3 Hertfordshire Planning Capacity and Resilience Action Plan

3.1 The action plan set out in the tables below has centred on three main areas of future activity: these are through joint working and sharing of capacity and resources, through measures that raise awareness of this world of work, locally and more broadly and measures that focus specifically on recruitment and retention. The action plan is aimed at improving the capacity and operation of the system as a whole, not just for the public sector in Hertfordshire. Sector colleagues will operate as a reference group and provide support in taking these various actions forward.

**Table 1:** Planning Capacity and Resilience Actions

1	<b>Actions to promote joint working, sharing of capacity and resources</b>	<b>Lead Authorities</b>
	Councils to explore the merits of establishing a joint planning application validation service to undertake the common technical processing/administrative work for planning services.	Four Councils have expressed an initial interest in this feasibility investigation: Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts District Council, Dacorum Borough Council and St Albans District Council.
2	<b>Measures to promote careers in the ‘Place’ sector in Hertfordshire</b>	<b>Task and Finish Group supported by HIDB</b>

	<p>Using new Hertfordshire <b>material</b> in schools, careers fairs etc. One that recognises the different levels that people come into this work, the entry points, and the qualifications at those entry points. Promotion of these roles to a wider audience and not just graduates, recognising the alternative ways into the industry.</p> <p>Mapping exercise to be undertaken with Oaklands College to determine the range of routes into careers in place work. Job mapping for planners would help identify the different levels that people come in and map the different entry points, and the qualifications at those entry points.</p> <p>Through HIDB undertake an active promotional PR campaign for the positive opportunities in place-based work and planning as a career particularly in Herts.</p>	
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Measures to help recruitment and retention of planners in Hertfordshire</b></p>	<p><b>Task and Finish Group</b></p>
	<p>Partners to organise <b>CPD events and programme for all planners in Herts</b>, to build enthusiasm, increase knowledge and encourage cross-county networking of the cohort as part of retention and training. Creation of a new USP for working in planning in Hertfordshire.</p> <p>Partners to establish a <b>countywide mentoring programme</b> – to increase skills development and as part of recruitment and retention</p> <p>Partners to devise a pan-Herts, pan sector <b>apprenticeship programme</b>, increasing the investment in new staff and allowing a broad (and highly attractive) learning approach by staff spending time at DLUHC, HCC, districts, Boroughs, and private sector, alongside learning</p> <p>Partners to devise <b>countywide career progression scheme</b></p>	

	Partners to devise <b>intensive skills development programme</b> to speed up the pace of skills development and to help with specific recruitment and retention of mid-career planning staff.	
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3.2 Growth Board is asked to endorse the action plan and to commission officers to work with the sector to secure its implementation. The Task and Finish group will continue to work on this area and progress on the individual action plan activities will be reported regularly through the Chief Executives Co-ordinating Group, HIPP and Growth Board.

**4 Implications**

4.1 There are no adverse legal, financial, equalities, environmental, sustainability or other implications arising from this report and its recommendations which support the ongoing work and priorities of the Growth Board.

**5 Recommendations**

5.1 That the Board agree the action plan actions identified in Table 1.

