

Response to Stephen McPartland MP's statement of 20 February

Many of the comments made in Mr McPartland's statement of 20 February have been heard previously at the examination.

In total Mr McPartland's comments cover topics dealt with under Matters 1, 3, 5, 9, 16, 19, 20 and 21. The Borough Council's original responses to representations received during the section 19 consultation, our matters' statements and our evidence in chief during hearing sessions have addressed [or will address, in the case of Matters 16, 19, 20 and 21] Mr McPartland's concerns.

This statement addresses the over-arching concerns about the deliverability of the town centre regeneration proposals set out variously in the local plan.

Policies TC1 – TC8

The comments relating to Matters 3, 19 and 20 [policies TC1, TC2, TC3, TC4, TC5 and TC6] are most effectively rebutted by making clear that Lytton Way is only to be closed to through traffic attempting to travel between Six Hills Way and Fairlands Way. The section between Six Hills Way and Danesgate will remain open [at reduced width] to traffic accessing the local area, including the new bus station; the section between Fairlands Way and Swingate will also remain open to local traffic [including traffic accessing the current Tesco store and the Westgate Centre].

The section between Danesgate and Swingate will be reduced in width and remain open for service buses and emergency vehicles, possibly in a carefully designed shared surface format.

None of these works requires the permission of the Government, such that it is wrong to assert that “...the closure of Lytton Way...has been rejected by the Government”. Funding for a variety of works in and around the train station has not been funded in Growth Deal 3, but it remains open to the promoting partners to re-apply for monies in future years once the concerns expressed by Government [about the ability to deliver the projects within specified short timescales] have been addressed. Consequently, there is no funding gap, as asserted by Mr McPartland.

Contrary to the assertion, none of policies TC1, TC2, TC6, TC7 nor TC8 place any reliance upon either the train station being relocated or Lytton Way being 'closed'.

In respect of issues of deliverability, neither of policies TC1 nor TC8 makes any reference to residential development. The residential development being proposed under policies TC2 – TC7 is capable of being delivered by either the private sector, the public sector or by [one or more] public-private sector collaboration[s].

The fact that the government has agreed to release £19.38M of investment in the town centre, subject to the creation of a new public-private sector regeneration partnership, exactly demonstrates this point.

It is clear that government has faith in the efficacy of the regeneration proposals and the local plan policies for the town centre.

Policy TC3, Centre West MOA

Legal and General [L&G] have been supportive of the local plan's proposals for the Centre West Major Opportunity Area, which is in their ownership. Policy TC3, criterion a, requires the development of new high-density residential units whilst criterion b requires the provision of replacement leisure, bar, café and restaurant uses on the site. Further criteria set out other development requirements.

It is clearly wrong to assert that the Use Class D1, D2 and A3, A4 uses are to be lost and will not be replaced on the site.

L&G will build housing within their site and will also protect their investment income from existing leisure uses, which has the benefit of retaining important facilities for residents.

Policies TC4, TC5 and TC7: replacement theatre & leisure facilities

The regeneration plan seeks to develop a strong cultural offer in the Town Centre. A project to deliver new leisure facilities and link it to youth activity is underway. The economics are positive for the Council to deliver this and to create 21st Century facilities for its residents.

Policy TC4 requires the demolition of the existing Arts and Leisure Centre [criterion ii] and the re-provision of replacement sports and theatre facilities elsewhere within Stevenage Central [criterion iii].

Policy TC5 picks up the point about the re-provision of the theatre, in its criterion vi, and identifies this as the location for a new municipal theatre and art gallery.

Policy TC7 picks up the point about the re-provision of the sports facilities displaced from the Arts and Leisure Centre. The policy requires, at criterion v, the development of a new sports/swimming complex on the site of the existing Swimming Centre.

Thus, there are clear plans set out for the re-provision of both the sports facilities and the municipal theatre displaced by the demolition of the Arts and Leisure Centre.

Deliverability of the Town Centre proposals

The regeneration plans for Stevenage Town Centre over the local plan period to 2031 have been based upon professional place-making input from David Lock Associates (DLA) and incorporating commercial expertise from DTZ and Cushman Wakefield. The overarching regeneration plan will deliver an invigorated Town Centre, with additional housing, 21st Century culture, leisure and retail.

The future regeneration governance arrangements are presently being updated to focus on moving into a delivery phase, but the key consideration is that the Borough Council and the other principal landowners are supportive of the strategy of the local plan.

Phase 1 of Town Centre regeneration: SG1

Nine land parcels [see attached map] that form the Southgate and part of the Central Core Major Opportunity Areas [policies TC2 and TC5] have been packaged together under the title 'SG1' to form a first phase of Town Centre regeneration delivery. 'SG1' will be launched to the market on March 30 and, following a comprehensive procurement process, a developer will be selected by the end of 2017.

This work has been supported by DLA and Cushman Wakefield.

SG1 will be a residential-led scheme, delivering in the order of 600 units; together with a new library, medical facility and civic space within a public sector hub; and new retailing around the existing Town Square.

This 'SG1' scheme has been confirmed as viable and has been through two soft market-testing exercises (pre- and post-Brexit). These exercises have confirmed that there is real developer interest in the commercial marketplace.

Over the past eighteen months, developer interest in the Town Centre has increased. The opportunities arising from the Framework and the Stevenage Borough Local Plan have been shared with the wider development community and an appetite has been created. Market conditions are also good for housing delivery in Stevenage. So the time is right, combined with the Town Centre plans to create the much needed homes.

Growth Deal 3 and the train station

Growth Deal 3 [GD3] was a process whereby all Local Enterprise Partnerships [LEPs] were required to bid to central government for money to support regeneration for the period only to 2021 i.e. Growth Deal 3 funding needs to be spent by 2021. Hertfordshire LEP was allocated £43.95M, of which £19.38M has been allocated to Stevenage. The Hertfordshire LEP considered proposals for how to use this funding and, in principle, have given their support for utilising it to support the existing regeneration plans for the Town Centre.

A significantly regenerated and expanded train station would not be capable of being delivered by 2021 and, therefore, it has not attracted government funding in this cycle of Growth Deal funding. It does not signal the absence of government support for the objective, as is asserted.

An improved train station has been supported by major local businesses [Glaxo Smith Kline, Airbus, L&G, Fujitsu] and work has progressed with Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway [GTR] on this. Initial work with Arup and Network Rail has led to an agreed concept design. Further work is already underway to create a detailed, programmed and fully costed design capable of being delivered during 2022 – 2026.

The local plan seeks to deliver a new station concourse with an improved east-west pedestrian route. The concept design shows a new station concourse and entrances that will: be accessible to all users; that will create the capacity for extra gates; and the space to deal with the increasing number of rail users. For the avoidance of doubt, the platforms (with a new fifth platform), tracks and general location will remain in the current location.

The new concourse and overbridge will be built in a new structure adjacent to the existing overbridge and concourse structure. This will minimise disruption to existing rail users during the construction phase. Once the new structure is completed, the existing buildings will be demolished.

Infrastructure Delivery Plan

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan [IDP] (TI1), was prepared for the submission of the Stevenage Borough Local Plan on 26 July 2016. It was based on the information available at that time.

The GD3 funding award was made on 2 February 2017. The IDP is being updated to reflect this. It should be noted that the IDP is a live document and has always been intended to be updated from time to time as new information becomes available. The updated IDP will shortly be provided to the Inspector.

3 March 2017