

**Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside**

Planning Policy Team  
Stevenage Borough Council  
Daneshill House  
Danestrete  
Stevenage  
SG1 1HN

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

6<sup>th</sup> March 2019 (by email)

Dear Planning Policy Team,

**Future Town Future Transport - A Transport Strategy for Stevenage - 2018**

Thank you for consulting CPRE Hertfordshire on this draft document.

General

CPRE Herts supports the objectives of the strategy. It contains many good ideas, initiatives and programmes and would be a useful template for other district planning authorities.

The Campaign for Protection of Rural England published a report "*The End of the Road*" in March 2017 (attached). Its research found that road building over the last two decades was both damaging to the rural environment and failed to relieve congestion. It called for a new priority in transport to:

- minimise demand - by focusing development in towns and near transport hubs.
- widen travel choices - by strategic investment in rail and light rail corridors and high-quality walking and cycling routes.
- improve efficiency - including road pricing to reinvest in public transport, car sharing schemes and more efficient freight transport.

The proposed Transport Strategy broadly aligns with these recommendations. We agree that there are numerous benefits in a shift away from private car dependency. Low car ownership and car use enables higher quality environments, subject to good place making, green infrastructure and a healthy mix of uses. Ideally most daily needs are met within a 20 - 30 min walk from home (20 min is a target in Portland USA for its 'complete neighbourhoods'). Low traffic redevelopment of brownfield sites reduces the need for remote greenfield development and urban sprawl. It also reduces demands for road building in Stevenage and the countryside.

CPRE supports provisions to enhance rail and bus infrastructure. We note the proposed widening of the A1M. While acknowledging localised congestion, CPRE Herts would question whether this represents value for money, especially by comparison to the benefits of spending on active travel modes which have a known health dividend (Dept. of Transport report 2014 by Dr Adrian Davis "*Claiming the Health Dividend*"). A1M widening is also at

odds with the main strategic objectives of modal shift/traffic reduction, improved air quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.

#### Details

The following detailed comments are made:

**Connectivity.** The walking and cycling links and routes to and from main stations and their attractiveness to users are extremely important; the town centre regeneration scheme should enable significant improvements.

*A strategic active travel route map* is needed, informed by patterns of use and key generators of trip movements. Presumably this will be within the LCWIP's (para 7.13) and part of the Sustainable Travel Town initiative. Routes should be on *Quietway* principles; attractively designed and landscaped, away from traffic noise and pollution, level as far as practical, direct and convenient. Opportunities for new 'at grade' crossings of roads should be considered as underpasses aren't always convenient, well-lit or overlooked.

The legacy network of Stevenage cycleways, designed by Eric Claxton for the new town, provided safe cycling options. However, it hasn't proved to be well used or maintained. Cycling is believed to be only 2-3% of all trips (15-30% is realised in many European cities). The cycleways parallel roads which, especially in the early days of Stevenage, were comparatively empty and quicker, so many residents switched to car driving habits. Other reasons for low use were strict town zoning and the distant separation of uses. The planned residential neighbourhoods did not always connect well or overlook the cycleway network either. This network can still support active travel use but more needs to be done to give advantage to cycling. A new and internal grid of *Quietways* through neighbourhoods should be designed based on user demands, attractiveness and convenience whilst still exploiting the original network. Projects to improve underpasses with lighting and landscaping are helpful, but a reliable budget to secure ongoing maintenance is needed as well as better signage - the cycleways being at lower level can make it difficult to know where you are.

**Liveable streets.** The Liveable Streets project is supported. It needs to ensure it is linked to the potential for ongoing connecting journeys on foot or by bike. It is hoped that the work with local communities to enhance their streets will promote local uses and businesses which in turn provide more local services, workplaces and a richer mix of uses. This creates more 'events' and interest along *Quietway* routes. Local facilities reduce the advantage of the car and the need to travel.

**Active Travel.** The objective of achieving a greater mode split for active travel is supported, but there is an absence of targets from the existing 3% cycling, 9% walking (2011 census).

CPRE promotes access to and enjoyment of the countryside. In Stevenage, the A1 (M) and other distributor roads e.g. Gresley Way are a hostile barrier for Stevenage residents. It is understood the strategy (8.3) will review all the links and rights of way. A programme to

enhance these is needed as part of an *Active Leisure Plan*. This can link to the STOOOP route (para 8.3). Good quality routes and rights of way, away from traffic noise and pollution, and designed with regard to the user experience enable more residents to exercise and enjoy the beautiful countryside around Stevenage.

The health dividend should be emphasised in the strategy. It makes investment a win-win for government spending. The UK Chief Medical Officers stated that: *“For most people, the easiest and most acceptable forms of physical activity are those that can be incorporated into everyday life. Examples include walking or cycling instead of travelling by car, bus or train.”* Mental health and well-being and employee absenteeism are all improved among people who walk or cycle. Active Travel investments should be viewed positively as a net financial saving to the public purse (para 10.2) when health and maintenance savings are factored in. In Copenhagen, the city determined that every kilometre conducted by bicycle in Copenhagen effectively saved the city US25 cents in health and road maintenance.

A 2014 Dept of Transport report *Value for Money Assessment for Cycling Grants* concluded that targeted investment into cycling brings very strong returns. Cost-benefit rates for many cycling schemes reached 5.5 and some as high as 35 to 1. This compares to road or rail schemes which require a benefit cost ratio of 1.5 - 2 to be medium value for money. With such a large potential shift in travel modes in Stevenage, active travel spending can be viewed as an investment bringing net financial savings with wider benefits. Many local measures e.g. advance stop lines, wheel channels on flights of steps, reduced use of barriers and dismount signs, light phasing priority at crossings and measures for filtered permeability can be introduced as low cost quick wins.

The holding of town events for cycling, running and walking or other festivals is welcome as a means for people to appreciate a more active lifestyle, car free environments and can help to change habits and attitudes.

**Green Travel.** Green Travel Plans need to be robust and include targets for modal share and financial incentives for active travel e.g season tickets for passenger transport, grants for cycle purchase or car club membership. Stevenage’s own Green Travel Plan 2013 - 2018 aims to increase active travel from 8-12% of staff and sustainable travel modes from 21 to 28%. Businesses should be discouraged from requiring employers to provide a car for work purposes and to consider car pools and work place charging to fund active travel rewards. S106 agreements, within the tests of national guidance, can promote car sharing in new developments e.g. free annual membership. Sustainable travel benefits and options need to be marketed from the start. Timing is critical as residents need travel provisions to be in place before getting locked into costly car purchases.

### **Other matters**

Householder benefits. Enabling people to live with fewer cars is a great cost saving on household incomes. Fixed car ownership costs are high but on average cars are unused 95% of the time. Research has shown highest levels of personal indebtedness in highest car owning areas.

IT. The use of IT may also provide ways to encourage new habits. Bologna Italy developed a smartphone application which provides credits to people as they increase walking, cycling and use of passenger transport.

<https://www.welovecycling.com/wide/2018/10/23/this-city-in-italy-gives-you-free-beer-for-cycling/>

Monitoring. This is referenced but it would be preferable to be more open about the aims for modal shift to assess effectiveness. The strategy must have a clear sense of direction for ambitious but realistic future targets.

Electric vehicles. Charging infrastructure will be needed but the use of public footways for electric charging points can be detrimental to pedestrian and cycling. Electric bike use is growing in popularity and Stevenage is well placed to exploit this trend.

Climate Change policies will require action locally. The strategy refers to this but national policy can be anticipated to make increasing demands. Stevenage could ask itself what targets it has to set to be carbon neutral by 2050? The document mentions (3.44) that a quarter of UK carbon emissions are accounted for by transport. Transport is now the greatest contributing element as more reductions have been achieved in other sectors.

It is assumed that organisations such as Sustrans and Campaign for Better Transport have been consulted and engaged on the strategy.

Yours faithfully,

Tim Hagyard  
Planning Manager

Enc.

*“The End of the Road - Challenging the Road Building Consensus”*. CPRE. March 2017.

*“Claiming the Health Dividend: A summary and discussion of value for money estimates from studies of investment in walking and cycling”* Dr Adrian Davis for Department of Transport 2014