

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 19 NOVEMBER 2024
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE – ENDORSEMENT OF ESTATES VISION 2035

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The University of Hertfordshire is a significant presence in the Borough. The University has approximately 3,000 staff and 36,000 students, and is based on two campuses in Hatfield, along with a small building in the town centre.
- 1.2 Policy SP21 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2016 – 2036 (adopted October 2023) says that the Council will support enhancement of the University's teaching and learning facilities subject to proposals being consistent with an agreed masterplan.
- 1.3 A previous University masterplan, the Estates Vision 2030, was completed in 2019.
- 1.4 The University wishes to bring forward significant redevelopment and consolidation of its estate in the next few years which will bring considerable benefit to the borough.
- 1.5 Endorsement of the Estates Vision will enable future planning applications to be considered in the context of the overall vision and will enable the Vision itself to be treated as a material consideration. Whilst individual applications, along with their impacts, will still need to be considered through the planning process, the existence of a strategic framework will demonstrate the Council's in principle support for their future plans.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Panel recommends to Cabinet that:
 - The University of Hertfordshire Estates Vision and accompanying phasing plans (Appendix A) be endorsed for development management purposes.
 - That the contents of the Estates Vision be treated as a material consideration in future planning applications.

3. Explanation

- 3.1 The University of Hertfordshire is a significant presence in the Borough and Hatfield in particular, and plays a very important role in the local economy. The University is located on two campuses; De Havilland and College Lane, along with a smaller building – Meridien House – in Hatfield Town Centre.
- 3.2 The University has around 36,000 students and 3,000 staff. Whilst a number live at home or commute in from outside the borough, the majority of students live in the town or close by. Development of a significant amount of residential accommodation on the two campuses in the last decade has concentrated students on campus and is considered to have enabled a significant number of properties previously used as student accommodation to be used instead as family homes.
- 3.3 The University has a significant programme of investing in its estate in order to ensure that the University offers the best teaching and learning experience, and in order to attract students to study there. Recent development has included the SPECTRA (School of Physics, Engineering and Computer Science) building which provides new space for teaching and which opened in Autumn 2024.
- 3.4 As well as wishing to enhance the student experience and improve the teaching environment, the University is also seeking to address challenges arising from the existing estate such as a number of older (1950's) buildings, seeking to achieve net zero, and poor navigation around the College Lane campus.
- 3.5 Policy SP21 of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2016 – 2036 (adopted October 2023) says that the Council “will seek to maximise the economic development and community benefits associated with the presence of the University of Hertfordshire” and “will support proposals for the enhancement of the University’s teaching and learning environment and of its campus facilities” subject to proposals being consistent with an agreed Masterplan.
- 3.6 The University has produced such a document previously and the Estates Vision 2030 was completed in November 2019.
- 3.7 The Estates Vision 2035 which is attached at Appendix A sets out the University’s future development plans over the next decade. There are a number of projects and aspirations contained in the Vision but the three key proposals set out are:
- College Lane Campus Transformation – Green Herts. This will demolish much of the older building stock, will create new green space and improved navigation around the campus and will link to a new building for the School of Health and Social Work.
 - New Buildings for School of Health and Social Work and a new School of Medicine. This will provide new facilities on the College Lane Campus for the School of Health and Social Work and will repurpose an existing building to create a new School of Medicine, the first such facility in Hertfordshire.
 - A new Hertfordshire Business School building on the De Havilland Campus. This will provide a significant degree of flexible teaching space and

accommodate a significant number of post graduate as well as under graduate students.

- 3.8 Whilst these proposals represent a significant investment by the University, they are largely a regeneration of the existing sites and will be accompanied by the demolition of some existing buildings which are considered to have reached the end of their life.
- 3.9 The University has an aspiration to increase student numbers slightly from the current level to 38,000. However, as student numbers are a mixture of those attending, those attending partner sites, those distance learning and some not actually attending on a particular day, it is not considered that the proposed developments will lead to a significant increase in either staff or student numbers on a day to day basis.
- 3.10 Endorsement of the Estates Vision will enable it to be treated as a material consideration in the determination of future planning applications and will be in line with Policy SP21 of the Local Plan. A phasing plan, also attached at Appendix A, shows the expected timelines for each of these projects and the other proposals set out in the Vision.
- 3.11 Individual planning applications will still need to be made, and the applications and their impacts will be fully considered through this process. However, endorsement of the Estates Vision will give an overall framework under which these applications can be considered and will put individual proposals into a longer term context, and will show the Council's in principle support for the University's future development aspirations.

4. Link to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Estates Vision is in line with Council priorities of Enable and Economy that Delivers for Everyone and Action on Climate Change.

5. Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this item.

6. Legal Implication(s)

- 6.1 Endorsement of the University of Hertfordshire Estates Vision 2035 would enable it to be treated as a material consideration in future planning applications.

7. Climate Change Implication(s)

- 7.1 The University is seeking to get to net zero by 2050 and is currently impacted by the performance of a number of older, particularly 1950's, buildings. The Estates Vision seeks to help address both of these areas.

8. Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising directly as a result of this report.

9. Equality and Diversity

9.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

10. Procurement Implication(s)

10.1 There are no procurement implications arising directly as a result of this report.

11. Risk Management Implications

11.1 The University is a major stakeholder in the Borough and has a significant economic impact. Not endorsing this Estates Vision could suggest that the Council was not supportive of its future plans, which could have a detrimental impact locally.

11.2 Policy Implication(s)

11.3 The University of Hertfordshire Estates Vision 2035 is in line with, and helps deliver, Policy SP21 in the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan 2016-2036 (adopted October 2023).

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Date	October 2024

Appendices:

Appendix A:	University of Hertfordshire Estates Vision 2035
	University of Hertfordshire Estates Vision Phasing Plans