

Strategic policies

Sustainable Development

Policy SP1: Sustainable Development in North Hertfordshire

This plan supports the principles of sustainable development within North Hertfordshire. We will:

- a. Maintain the role of key settlements within and adjoining the District as the main focus for housing, employment and new development making use of previously developed land where possible;
- b. Ensure the long-term vitality of the District's villages by supporting growth which provides opportunities for existing and new residents and sustains key facilities;
- c. Grant planning permission for proposals that, individually or cumulatively:
 - i. Deliver an appropriate mix of homes, jobs and facilities that contribute towards the targets and aspirations in this plan;
 - ii. Create high-quality developments that respect and improve their surroundings and provide opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices;
 - iii. Provide the necessary infrastructure required to support an increasing population;
 - iv. Protect key elements of North Hertfordshire's environment including important landscapes, heritage assets and green infrastructure (including the water environment); and
 - v. Include any necessary mitigation measures that reduce the impact of development on climate change; and
- d. Support neighbourhood plans and other local planning initiatives where they are in general conformity with the strategic policies of this Local Plan.

- SP1.1 Government policy is clear that the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development. This means improving our lives today while not compromising our ability to do so in the future. It means supporting growth whilst protecting key elements of the natural and historic environment.
- SP1.2 In implementing this plan, we will take a positive approach that ensures we can continue to permit the significant majority of planning applications for new development.
- SP1.3 Policy SP1 sets out guiding principles for planning in the District over the period to 2031. We will seek to grant permission wherever proposals support these strategic aims and meet the requirements set out in this plan.
- SP1.4 These principles are already evident across the District. Letchworth has a global reputation as the world's first garden city. Hitchin, Baldock and Royston are established market towns built around a historic core. Our villages provide highly valued environments in which to live away from the main towns, yet also have provided opportunities for sensitive growth over time.
- SP1.5 These settlements are located within a wider setting of which the District can be proud. North Hertfordshire has a rich and varied historic environment while high quality landscapes and areas of national importance surround our towns and villages. These factors help to maintain separate identities and also provide opportunities for residents to interact with the wider countryside around them.
- SP1.6 This plan accommodates necessary growth whilst maintaining these characteristics. New development will integrate with its surrounds rather than being remote. We will

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

make use of previously developed land where possible. Key protections will be respected.

- SP1.7 In setting a framework for growth, this plan also recognises the value of local knowledge and the importance of local choice. A number of parishes within the District are already designated Neighbourhood Planning areas and our Local Plan is structured flexibly in response. This chapter contains the policies and aspirations with which any neighbourhood plans, or other local planning initiatives, must be in general conformity.
- SP1.8 Beyond this, there remains scope for local interpretation. Local housing allocations and, beyond the Green Belt, village boundaries are examples of issues which are open to debate and change through the Neighbourhood Planning system. Local communities will be able to supplement the policies in this plan or identify alternate approaches whilst adhering to the key principles we have set out.
- SP1.9 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that our policy provides an overarching expression of what sustainable development would look like in North Hertfordshire, it is strategic in nature and broadly covers sustainable development priorities.

Policy SP2: Settlement Hierarchy

The majority of the District's development will be located within or adjoining the following towns:

- Baldock;
- Hitchin;
- Letchworth Garden City;
- Royston;
- Stevenage (including Great Ashby)¹; and
- Luton¹.

General development will also be allowed within the defined settlement boundaries of the Category A villages of:

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| • Ashwell; | • Ickleford; | • Preston; |
| • Barkway; | • Kimpton; | • Reed; |
| • Barley; | • Knebworth; | • Sandon; |
| • Breachwood Green; | • Little Wymondley; | • St Ippolyts; |
| • Cockernhoe; | • Lower Stondon ¹ ; | • Therfield; |
| • Codicote; | • Oaklands ¹ ; | • Weston; and |
| • Graveley; | • Offley; | • Whitwell. |
| • Hexton; | • Pirton; | |

Infilling development which does not extend the built core of the village will be allowed in the Category B villages of:

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| • Blackmore End; | • Kelshall; | • Old Knebworth; |
| • Great Wymondley; | • Lilley; | • Rushden; |
| • Hinxworth; | • Newnham; | • Wallington; and |
| • Holwell; | | • Willian. |

Only limited affordable housing and facilities for local community needs will be allowed in the Category C settlements of:

¹ These settlements are (substantively) located outside of North Hertfordshire's administrative area, but the urban areas adjoin, or already lie partially within, the District.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bygrave;• Caldecote; | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clothall;• Langley;• Nuthampstead; | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peters Green; and• Radwell |
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- SP2.1 North Hertfordshire includes a range of settlements, including isolated rural hamlets, numerous villages, the four towns of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston, and large parts of the Great Ashby estate on the edge of Stevenage.
- SP2.2 The Council wishes to focus the majority of new development on the towns (including urban extensions to existing towns) in order to make maximum use of existing facilities, social networks and infrastructure, and maximise opportunities to deliver new infrastructure. However, it is important to allow growth of the villages in order to allow those communities to continue to function.
- SP2.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) acknowledges sometimes development in one village may support services in other nearby villages. Although some communities may lack a full range of facilities themselves, they should not be barred from further development. In many of the District's rural areas the average number of people per household is falling. Some of the villages have seen very little growth in recent years and their populations have actually fallen. Our evidence gives further consideration to these issues and explains how the settlement hierarchy has been developed². For those areas within the Green Belt, we have additionally considered how villages contribute to openness³.
- SP2.4 Category A villages, normally those containing primary schools, all have defined boundaries within which development will be allowed and sites have been allocated to meet the District's overall housing totals. Category A villages have defined settlement boundaries and are excluded from the policy designation (either Green Belt or Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt – see Policy SP5) which affects the surrounding countryside.
- SP2.5 Category B villages are those with a lower level of facilities such as village halls and public houses. Category B villages will be allowed to accommodate limited infill development that does not expand the built core of the village into the surrounding countryside.
- SP2.6 Blackmore End has been excluded from the Green Belt because of its limited contribution to the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. For the remaining Category B villages, this plan does not define a settlement boundary or the extent of the built core. The Council believes it should be possible to assess on a case-by-case basis whether a site is in the built core. However, that may be something that affected communities wish to explore through neighbourhood plans.
- SP2.7 The Category C settlements are
- those which give their names to a parish that does not contain any category A or B villages; and / or
 - those with a modest level of facilities but which make an important contribution to the open character of the Green Belt.

² Housing and Green Belt Background Paper (NHDC, 2016)

³ Green Belt Review (NHDC, 2016). Paragraph 86 of the NPPF explains how planning authorities should consider villages within the Green Belt when setting boundaries.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP2.8 Within Category C settlements, a more restrictive approach will be taken. We will support limited affordable housing and schemes for community facilities which meet proven needs from that parish in line with the detailed policies of this plan.
- SP2.9 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that our policy will have a range of positive effects in seeking to focus new development within or adjoining existing settlements. There may be some potential negative impacts in terms of interaction with exiting residential areas and environmental aspects due to development being on greenfield sites. However these impacts can be mitigated and addressed through design and layout considerations and other policies in this plan.

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Policy SP3: Employment

The Council will proactively encourage sustainable economic growth, support new and existing businesses and seek to build on the District's strengths, location and offer. We will

- a. Bring forward an adequate supply and range of employment land in Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston to meet the requirements of the local economy over the plan period to 2031;
- b. Designate existing employment areas within the District's main settlements to enhance and safeguard employment potential;
- c. Support additional employment provision through new designations at:
 - i. the former Power Station, Letchworth Garden City (1.5ha);
 - ii. east of Baldock (19.6ha); and
 - iii. west of Royston (10.9ha);
- d. Work with landowners, developers and, for sites on the edge of the District, adjoining authorities to identify an appropriate amount of employment land to be included through the master planning process in major new developments;
- e. Permit an appropriate range of B-class employment uses within these areas;
- f. Promote and support the expansion of the knowledge based economy in the District. Proposals for the redevelopment of existing employment sites and the development of new allocated employment sites which increase the level of knowledge-intensive employment will be supported in principle.
- g. Support B-class uses in appropriate locations outside of designated employment areas, including offices in main town centres and concentrations of B-class uses in certain Category A villages; and
- h. Ensure relevant policies of this plan recognise the contribution of non-B-class sectors, including tourism, to the provision of jobs in the District.

SP3.1 In planning, employment land usually refers to 'B-class' uses⁴ and includes:

- B1(a) – offices
- B1(b) – research and development
- B1(c) – light industry
- B2 – general industry; and
- B8 – storage and distribution

SP3.2 The Council wants to see sustainable economic growth within North Hertfordshire. Skills, housing and economic development should be appropriately balanced. This will be achieved, in part, by working with other partners and through delivery of the Council's own economic development plans and projects.

SP3.3 North Hertfordshire District Council is a member of both the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP. This reflects its location and the varying economic influences on the District's settlements and rural area. Both LEPs will be important stakeholders regarding how the North Hertfordshire economy grows and develops in the future. In particular the Hertfordshire LEP is seeking to regain the county's competitive edge by encouraging increased employment growth and enterprise.

⁴ As defined in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order (1987) (as amended)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP3.4 The employment strategy of this plan is driven by three, interlinked priorities for the North Hertfordshire economy:
- Increasing representation in high skilled and high value sectors;
 - Reducing out-commuting by providing greater opportunities for people to both live and work in the District; and
 - Aligning employment development with housing growth to promote sustainable patterns of development and access by non-car modes.
- SP3.5 Our evidence shows that, compared to national averages there is a higher concentration of people working in the district employed in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, retail, motor trades, property, entertainment and recreation in North Hertfordshire. Many higher skilled residents commute out of the District for employment. Nonetheless sectors such as finance & insurance and information & communication make a substantial contribution to the District's overall economic output, although not employing a huge number of people. These represent opportunities for future expansion and development⁵.
- SP3.6 North Hertfordshire also fails to perform as well as some other Districts in Hertfordshire with regard to the knowledge economy. In partnership with key stakeholders, we will seek to increase the number of highly skilled jobs in the District. Economic growth sectors which are knowledge-intensive will be targeted. This includes research and development (R&D), life sciences, advanced manufacturing, computer-related activities, and other business activities in combination with growth of the low-carbon economy. With other stakeholders, the Council will:
- encourage business start-ups in the knowledge economy;
 - help develop existing local businesses in the knowledge economy;
 - target knowledge based businesses into North Herts; and
 - promote the take up of any new jobs by local people by promoting specific training and targeting recruitment at local residents.
- SP3.7 Due to the good levels of connectivity to other centres of employment, such as Stevenage, Welwyn Hatfield, and London it is unlikely that all the extra economically active population over the plan period will take up jobs within the District. In 2011, over a quarter of North Hertfordshire's working population were employed in these three centres, within another quarter employed elsewhere outside the District⁶.
- SP3.8 Trend-based forecasts reflect these patterns and anticipate continued increases in out-commuting from North Hertfordshire over the plan period⁷. Unchecked, this would lead to increased pressure on transport infrastructure that is already under strain at peak periods. This plan therefore makes employment provision at above modelled levels.
- SP3.9 The settlements of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock are very close together. There is a significant amount of commuting between these settlements. However, Baldock presently has a relatively low amount of employment land per person.

⁵ Employment land review (Regeneris Consulting, 2013)

⁶ Annual population Survey (ONS, 2010-2011)

⁷ East of England Forecasting Model (EEFM) (Cambridgeshire Insight, 2014)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP3.10 A significant new employment site will be developed at the east of Baldock, supporting the proposed increase in residential development in the town (see Policy SP8). The allocation benefits from proximity to existing employment uses as well as existing and planned residential development. It has access to the strategic road network via the A505 Baldock Bypass.
- SP3.11 Economic activity is not contained by the District boundary and North Hertfordshire needs to be viewed within its wider Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA). Joint work has identified a FEMA along the A1(M) corridor. This area broadly covers North Hertfordshire, Stevenage and the eastern part of Central Bedfordshire⁸. The allocation at Baldock also takes account of the long term needs which will arise within the wider FEMA. Stevenage, in particular, anticipates a shortfall of employment land against modelled requirements⁹. These models assume continued commuting from North Hertfordshire to Stevenage, yet there is insufficient land in Stevenage to cater for the resultant growth.
- SP3.12 Within Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City, employment area designations from the previous local plan will be broadly retained, with some modest releases of sustainable, brownfield sites for residential development. Within Letchworth, the former power station site at Works Road has been brought back into use for employment purposes and is reflected in a new planning designation.
- SP3.13 Royston is somewhat separate from the Hitchin / Letchworth Garden City / Baldock area, in geographical terms and in employment and labour market terms. The Royston economy is influenced by both Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire economies. Consequently, the employment area has a low vacancy rate. The allocation of further land here as a planned extension to the York Way employment area is a sustainable approach that will enable flexibility in the long term, especially in conjunction with the additional residential growth allocated to this area.
- SP3.14 Over the plan period this approach will provide substantial opportunities to reduce commuting that occurs across and beyond the District, redressing the employment balance.
- SP3.15 Within these designated areas, an appropriate range of B-class uses will be permitted in line with the detailed policies of this plan.
- SP3.16 B-class uses will not be solely confined to designated employment areas. A number of employment premises are located outside of defined areas and these will continue to be supported where they are compatible with other surrounding uses. In particular, office uses will continue to be supported in the main town centres (see Policy SP4), in line with national planning policy.
- SP3.17 Beyond our main towns, there is a steady demand for rural employment land and premises. Owing to the size and extensive spread of rural settlements these types of development are best dealt with on a case-by-case basis rather than through allocations, although our general approach will be to direct concentrations of rural business to the Category A villages. There are quite sizeable employment sites in villages such as Ashwell, Codicote, Kimpton, Little Wymondley and Weston which provide rural jobs and should be retained.
- SP3.18 Approximately 45% of all jobs fall into the B uses classes. The rest of the jobs in the local economy consist of services such as retail, health, education and leisure, or

⁸ Functional Economic Market Area Study (NLP, 2015)

⁹ Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031: Publication Draft (Stevenage Borough Council, 2016)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

'footloose' careers in sectors such as construction and the trades. The role of these non-B-class sectors in the overall employment balance of the District is recognised and will continue to be supported.

SP3.19 Our Sustainability Appraisal says our policy provides strong support for employment growth and diversification in North Hertfordshire.

Policy SP4: Town and Local Centres

The Council will make provision for an appropriate range of retail facilities across the District and are committed to protecting the vitality and viability of all centres.

We will:

- a. Promote, protect and enhance the retail and service functions of the following centres in our retail hierarchy:
 - i. The town centres of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock and Royston;
 - ii. 13 existing local centres consisting of:
 - Village centres at Ashwell, Codicote and Knebworth;
 - Seven centres in Hitchin
 - Two centres in Letchworth; and
 - The centre at Great Ashby; and
 - iii. 2 new local centres north of Baldock and East of Luton within the strategic housing sites identified in this plan;
- b. Support proposals for main town centre uses in these locations where they are appropriate to the size, scale, function, catchment area, historic and architectural character of the centre;
- c. Identify Primary Shopping Frontages within town centres where A1 retail uses will be expected to concentrate
- d. Make provision for 38,100m² of additional A-class floorspace over the plan period, consisting of:
 - i. 22,500m² comparison goods (e.g. clothes, shoes, furniture, carpets);
 - ii. 8,500m² convenience (e.g. food, drink, toiletries); and
 - iii. 7,000m² other town centre uses
- e. Maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support this approach and / or adapt to change; and
- f. Support the retention and provision of shops outside of identified centres where they serve a local need

SP4.1 The District contains a range of retail and service centres, from medium sized towns to small village and neighbourhood centres. Each one performs a particular role to meet the needs of its catchment population, and is part of network of centres within the District. The Council is committed to protecting the vitality and viability of all centres.

SP4.2 North Hertfordshire lies within complex shopping catchment areas, which include Cambridge as a regional centre and Bedford, Luton, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City as major town centres. The District itself has four town centres: Hitchin is the largest, followed by Letchworth Garden City and then the smaller town centres of Royston and Baldock. There are also a number of local village and neighbourhood centres.

SP4.3 We are committed to promoting the well-being of the four town centres in the District. Town centre strategies have been produced for the main centres of Hitchin,

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

Baldock, Letchworth Garden City, and Royston. These promote the vitality and viability of the centres and cover all those aspects of policy guidance with a spatial dimension relevant to town centres, including economic, environmental and social well-being and matters such as community safety, community facilities, traffic management, marketing and delivery. The strategies provide a method of keeping town centre development up-to-date and flexible to take account of ongoing changes in the retail environment.

- SP4.4 Our detailed policies set out our approach to development applications, including for changes of use. In general terms, A1 retail uses will be expected to concentrate within the defined primary frontages with a wider variety of A-class uses permissible in secondary frontage areas.
- SP4.5 The village centres of Codicote and Knebworth are large enough to provide a focus for the communities local to them and a range of everyday shopping facilities and services. The village centre of Ashwell contains a more limited range of shops and services, and is more fragmented than Codicote and Knebworth's village centres. However, Ashwell still has enough shops, services and facilities to have a designated centre, unlike many other small settlements in the District.
- SP4.6 The suburban neighbourhood centres in Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Great Ashby vary considerably, in terms of size, range of shops and services and catchment area. However, they are all worthy of a level of protection. The Council wants to improve and protect the District's centres, reduce the need for unnecessary travel to alternative facilities and ensure that the proportion of expenditure going outside the District does not increase.
- SP4.7 The growth of the District will require additional centres to be provided to serve the largest new developments at Baldock and on the edge of Luton. Once built, these will become local centres in our retail hierarchy and future proposals within them will be assessed appropriately.
- SP4.8 These will be supplemented by smaller, neighbourhood-level centres in these and other Strategic Housing Sites which will not form part of the formal retail hierarchy but will be protected by the general retail policies of this plan.
- SP4.9 Our evidence shows there will be a steady growth in retail demand over the plan period. Driven in part by planned population growth but also by underlying changes in the way people shop and how much money they have available to spend. It is anticipated that on-line shopping will continue to grow whilst a certain amount of future demand can be accommodated through the re-occupation of existing, vacant shop units. However, it is also necessary to identify new sites for retail¹⁰.
- SP4.10 Some of this future demand will be met within the development sites identified in this plan, ensuring that new residents have access to an appropriate range of local shops. Where planned urban extensions adjoin towns outside of the District, we will work with neighbouring authorities to identify the most appropriate types and levels of additional provision.
- SP4.11 Further allocations and broad locations are identified within our main towns to accommodate the remainder.
- SP4.12 A number of shops are located outside of our retail hierarchy. This includes individual premises and small groups of shops that perform a neighbourhood

¹⁰ North Hertfordshire Retail Study Update (Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners, 2016)

**North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016**

function, including those in a number of rural settlements. Our detailed policies set out our approach.

- SP4.13 Our Sustainability Appraisal concludes that this policy provides clear support for existing town and local centres and should have direct economic benefits and contribute to the achievement of sustainable patterns of land use.

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Countryside and Green Belt

Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt

We support the principles of the Green Belt and recognise the intrinsic value of the countryside. Green Belt and Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt are shown on the Proposals Map. We:

- a. Have conducted a comprehensive review of the Green Belt. Land has been removed from the Green Belt to:
 - i. Enable strategic development at the locations referred to in Policies SP8 and SP3;
 - ii. Enable local development around a number of the District's towns and villages;
 - iii. Define boundaries for villages referred to in Policy SP2 which fall within the Green Belt but were previously 'washed over' by this designation;
- b. Have provided new Green Belt to cover, in general terms, the area bounded by the Metropolitan Green Belt to the east, the Luton Green Belt to the west and the A505 Offley bypass to the north;
- c. Will only permit development proposals in the Green Belt where they would not result in inappropriate development; and
- d. Will operate a general policy of restraint in Rural Areas beyond the Green Belt.

- SP5.1 The vast majority of land in North Hertfordshire is rural in nature. Whilst more than three-quarters of the District's homes are in the towns, the land area of these main settlements covers less than 7% of the District.
- SP5.2 Restraint on unsustainable development in rural areas is a well established policy in this area. The District has previously had two distinct areas of Green Belt. The London (Metropolitan) Green Belt covers Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Stevenage and nearby areas. The Luton Green Belt covers parts of the west of the District. There are also rural areas beyond the Green Belt.
- SP5.3 National policy allows for Green Belt boundaries to be altered through the preparation of local plans where 'exceptional circumstances' exist. Although there is no definition of this term within Government guidance, this matter has been considered by the courts¹¹. Our evidence considers the approach that has been recommended¹². On balance, it is considered that the relevant circumstances do exist within North Hertfordshire to review boundaries and enable development to meet locally identified needs.
- SP5.4 Green Belt boundaries have been reviewed around all of the main towns within and adjoining the District, with the exception of Royston which lies beyond the Green Belt. Boundaries have also been reviewed where they previously surrounded or covered ('washed over') Category A and Category B villages within the Green Belt.
- SP5.5 In part to offset the Green Belt releases necessary to meet housing needs, particularly in the Stevenage, Hitchin and Luton area, an additional area of Green Belt is designated around Offley and Whitwell to cover an area which was not previously Green Belt. This has the effect of linking the formerly separate

¹¹ Including in *Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council & Ors* [2015] EWHC 1078 (Admin) (21 April 2015)

¹² Green Belt Review (NHDC, 2016), Housing and Green Belt Background Paper (NHDC, 2016)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

Metropolitan and Luton Green Belts. This new area of Green Belt is intended to strengthen protection in the area of the District between Stevenage and Luton.

- SP5.6 Proposals for development within the Green Belt will be considered against national guidance. Where the proposed use can be considered acceptable in principle, we will use the detailed policies of this plan to determine whether permission should be granted.
- SP5.7 National policy generally guards against further alterations to Green Belt in the short- to medium-term following a review¹³. However, this requirement is not absolute. Given the potential direction of future local plan reviews, and the need to properly consider long-term solutions, it is not considered appropriate to identify significant areas of safeguarded land at this point. The exception to this is to the west of Stevenage (see Policy SP8 and Monitoring and Delivery chapter).
- SP5.8 The Rural Area Beyond the Green Belt covers the majority of the east of the District including most of the land between Baldock and Royston as well as the villages and countryside to the south of Royston.
- SP5.9 In terms of intrinsic character and beauty, this area contains some of the highest quality countryside in the District. However, the settlements are generally more dispersed meaning a Green Belt designation cannot be justified. This sparser pattern of development additionally means that, outside of the defined settlements, many sites are not well located in relation to key services. On these grounds it remains appropriate to have a policy of restraint. Our detailed policies set out the approach that will apply in this area.
- SP5.10 Wherever possible, the inner boundaries of the Green Belt and Rural Area have been drawn around our settlements using strong features that provide clear, defensible boundaries. In certain cases this means that some land that we wish to remain undeveloped lie within the settlement envelopes. Urban Open Land designations are used at Baldock, Royston and Little Wymondley to ensure the affected land remains protected. Our detailed policies set out these allocations and our approach.
- SP5.11 Both the Green Belt and the Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt are policy designations designed to restrict the types and amount of new development that can occur. Our approach to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and areas of countryside which are valuable in terms of their landscape and biodiversity is set out in Policy SP12.
- SP5.12 Our Sustainability Appraisal recognises that releasing Green Belt sites for housing and economic development should help to support economic growth in the District and will play an important role in providing the necessary level of new housing, including affordable housing. However, it will also have some negative environmental effects. We will concentrate on reducing and mitigating these impacts through other policies in this plan.

¹³ Paragraph 85 of the NPPF

Transport and Infrastructure

Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport

We will deliver accessibility improvements and promote the use of sustainable transport modes insofar as reasonable and practicable. We will:

- a. Comply with the provisions of the Local Transport Plan and other supporting documents as considered necessary;
- b. Encourage development in locations which enable sustainable journeys to be made to key services and facilities;
- c. Work with Hertfordshire County Council, Highways England and service providers to ensure that a range of sustainable transport options are available to all potential occupants or users. This may involve new or improved pedestrian, cycle and passenger transport (including rail and/or bus) links and routes;
- d. Seek the early implementation of sustainable travel infrastructure on Strategic Housing Sites in order to influence the behaviour of occupiers or users, along with supporting Travel Plans in order that sustainable travel patterns become embedded at an early stage;
- e. Assess development proposals against the parking standards set out in this plan and relevant supplementary advice;
- f. Require applicants to provide assessments, plans and supporting documents to demonstrate the safety and sustainability of their proposals; and
- g. Protect existing rights of way, cycling and equestrian routes and, should diversion be unavoidable, require replacement routes to the satisfaction of the Council.

- SP6.1 North Hertfordshire has a relatively good transport network, although the strategic road and rail links are generally better for north-south access than for east-west access. There is also an extensive local road network, which connect the four main towns within North Hertfordshire with its surrounding rural area.
- SP6.2 National and local policies and guidance seek to reduce the growth of car usage and achieve greater use of more sustainable modes of transport.
- SP6.3 The primary responsibility for delivering transport provision in North Hertfordshire rests with Hertfordshire County Council as the local highway authority. Highways England are responsible for the strategic road network which includes the A1(M) within North Hertfordshire. The involvement of North Hertfordshire District Council relates mainly to Development Planning and the management and enforcement of parking which could have implications on the local and strategic highway network.
- SP6.4 The overarching transport policy document for the area is the Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP3) which provides the framework for achieving better transport systems in Hertfordshire for the plan period 2011-2031. The LTP4 is in progress which will cover the Hertfordshire 2020 Transport vision and will be consulted on in late 2016. The Local Transport Plan covers all modes of transport including walking, cycling, public transport, car based travel, reducing road freight movements and making provision for those with mobility impairments.
- SP6.5 Although the LTP3 identifies some specific schemes, the majority of transport schemes are identified at settlement level. From time to time the County Council publishes other documents and strategies which will also need to be taken into account.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP6.6 New development can help to improve the range of transport opportunities available in the District by helping to improve existing facilities and providing new components where required.
- SP6.7 However, national policy also recognises that the scope for passenger transport and/or other sustainable transport measures may be more limited in some locations¹⁴. Best endeavours should still be made to ensure that the best outcomes can be achieved for all new developments, regardless of their location.
- SP6.8 In pursuing this approach, we need to take a pragmatic and realistic approach that recognises the role of the car in modern lifestyles. Even if sustainable alternatives are used for journeys to school or work, most households will still have access to a car for other trips.
- SP6.9 Parking standards will be used to assess applications for development. These take a balanced approach that reflects the levels of car ownership we expect from new development. Our detailed policies additionally set out the approach we will take to the assessment of highway proposals and provision for pedestrians and cyclists.
- SP6.10 Due to the largely rural nature of much of the District, there are many public rights of way that exist across North Hertfordshire. These are protected under their own statutory regime. However, diversion applications to facilitate development are made to the District Council. A number of the sites identified in this plan contain public rights of way. Any applications to modify or divert these routes will be considered separately to any planning application. However, our general expectation is that existing rights of way should be incorporated into the green infrastructure of development proposals. Wherever possible, existing routes and alignments should be maintained.
- SP6.11 Our Sustainability Appraisal says our policy provides strong and clear support for sustainable patterns of development. The early provision of sustainable travel infrastructure as part of new developments is supported.

Policy SP7: Infrastructure Requirements and Developer Contributions

The Council will require development proposals to make provision for infrastructure that is necessary in order to accommodate additional demands resulting from the development. We will:

- a. Require developers to provide, finance and / or contribute towards provision which is fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development, including:
 - i. On-site and/or off-site improvements and infrastructure necessary as a result of the development in order to:
 - ensure appropriate provision of facilities and infrastructure for new residents;
 - help address cumulative impacts that might arise across multiple developments;
 - avoid placing unreasonable additional burdens on the existing community or existing infrastructure;
 - mitigate any adverse impacts; and/or
 - enhance critical assets or make good their loss or damage;
 - ii. Maintenance and/or operating costs of any such new provision;
- b. Ensure new infrastructure to support new development is operational no

¹⁴ Paragraph 29 of the NPPF

later than the completion of development or phase in which it is needed, unless otherwise agreed with relevant providers;

- c. Refuse planning permission where appropriate agreements or processes ensuring criteria (a) and (b) can be met are not in place;
- d. Have regard to any guidance or requirements in relation to planning obligations and any Community Infrastructure Levy which may be introduced;
- e. Work with landowners, developers and other agencies in facilitating the delivery of sites identified in the Local Plan and seek to overcome known obstacles; and
- f. Seek to take a reasonable approach where viability issues impact the delivery of key infrastructure and/or mitigation measures.

- SP7.1 The nature of planned growth in the District is such that new facilities and infrastructure will be required. Our strategic policy seeks to ensure that the necessary infrastructure and appropriate mitigation is provided.
- SP7.2 On the largest development sites, it will be necessary to directly provide facilities alongside the primary use – schools within residential areas, bus stops within business parks, cycling route and new footways etc.. In other areas, much of the growth arises from a number of smaller developments. A small development on its own may not be enough in itself to have a major impact within an area. However, cumulatively a number of developments can create additional demands and burdens on existing infrastructure which may require suitable mitigation to be implemented.
- SP7.3 Development can also impact upon existing built and natural assets. This could be through removing trees leading to a change in the biodiversity and landscape character of a site, to altering the setting of a listed building. One of the aims of the Local Plan is to seek to conserve and enhance such features. However, if there are reasons to allow proposals that outweigh any harmful effects, then appropriate mitigation or compensation will be required.
- SP7.4 The provision of infrastructure will need to be linked directly to the phasing of development to ensure that it is delivered in line with the timing of future growth. The Council will put in place formal arrangements for ensuring key infrastructure is delivered by the relevant bodies and that all funding sources, in addition to developer contributions are explored. Initial support (pump priming) may be necessary to reflect the time lag between provision and other funding streams. Where new facilities are provided then start-up, maintenance and operating costs will be required.
- SP7.5 Our evidence base sets out in greater detail the infrastructure that we anticipate will be required¹⁵. This will be reviewed throughout the plan period to ensure that decisions on infrastructure are made in light of up-to-date information. This provides flexibility as the role and nature of infrastructure providers will change over the period to 2031.
- SP7.6 At present, infrastructure contributions are normally secured through legal agreements. The Council will explore new mechanisms for contributions to new infrastructure provision.

¹⁵ Infrastructure Delivery Plan (RS Regeneration, 2016)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP7.7 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a way of collecting contributions from development through the use of standard charges. Any decision to develop a CIL for North Hertfordshire would be taken separately to the local plan. It would be subject to its own processes and Examination.
- SP7.8 Even if a CIL were to be implemented, legal agreements would still be necessary in many cases. On the largest sites they would be used to secure the delivery of on-site improvements such as schools and off-site improvements on the local highway network. On all sites, securing affordable housing will be dealt with by means of planning obligations. It is not currently the Government's intention to provide affordable housing through the CIL.
- SP7.9 Our evidence demonstrates that the requirements placed upon development by this plan should not prove a serious risk to its implementation¹⁶. However, there may be individual circumstances where this is not the case. This may arise for a number of reasons. It may be as a result of (unexpected) site-specific circumstances. It may be as a result of wider factors, such as the state of the economy.
- SP7.10 In cases where viability is an issue, developers will be expected to pay for an independent assessment and analysis of their viability evidence. The methodology and scope of any such assessment should be agreed in advance between the applicant and the Council. Where it is accepted that the viability of a scheme would be critically undermined by application of the Council's usual standards and expectations, we will:
- consider which requirements are most critical to securing development and meeting the overall vision and objectives of this plan;
 - assess the extent to which these might be met in a way which makes any scheme viable; and
 - determine whether this would result in an appropriate and acceptable level of contribution and / or mitigation.
- SP7.11 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that this policy is critical in ensuring that the plan delivers against a significant number of the sub-objectives in the sustainability appraisal framework, not only through ensuring the delivery of needed infrastructure but also through making provision for the mitigation of the adverse impacts of new development. The implementation and impacts of the policy will be carefully monitored through other policies in this plan to ensure that it does hinder future development.

¹⁶ North Hertfordshire Whole Plan Viability Assessment (DSP, 2016)

Housing and development

Policy SP8: Housing

Over the period 2011-2031, housing growth will be supported across the District. We will:

- a. Release sufficient land to deliver at least 14,600 new homes for North Hertfordshire's own needs. Of these:
 - i. Around 14,400 will be provided within that part of the District falling within the Stevenage Housing Market Area (HMA); while
 - ii. Around 200 will be provided within that part of the District falling within the Luton HMA;
- b. Provide additional land within the Luton HMA for a further 1,950 homes as a contribution towards the unmet needs for housing arising from Luton;
- c. Deliver these homes through the sites and allowances identified in this plan that will support approximately¹⁷:
 - i. 4,300 homes from completions and permissions achieved since 2011 and other allowances;
 - ii. 7,700 homes from six Strategic Housing Sites:
 - BA1 - North of Baldock for 2,800 homes (2,500 to be delivered by 2031);
 - LG1 - North of Letchworth for 900 homes;
 - NS1 - North of Stevenage in Graveley parish for 900 homes;
 - HT1 - East of Hitchin for 700 homes;
 - GA2 - North-east of Great Ashby in Weston parish for 600 homes; and
 - EL1 / EL2 / EL3 - East of Luton for 2,100 homes;
 - iii. 4,930 homes through local housing allocations that will provide homes on:
 - newly identified sites and land within pre-existing settlement limits;
 - sites released from the Green Belt as part of a comprehensive, District-wide review; and
 - land identified following a review of other relevant boundaries or designations.
 - iv. 6 new, permanent Gypsy and Traveller pitches
- d. Maintain a five-year housing land supply and target the completion of 20% of new homes over the plan period on previously developed land;
- e. Seek to provide long-term certainty by
 - i. Working with the Government and other relevant agencies to identify new settlement options within North Hertfordshire that can provide additional housing supply in the period after 2026; and
 - ii. Safeguarding land to the west of the A1(M) at Stevenage, as shown on the proposals map, for up to 3,100 dwellings in the period beyond 2026 subject to a future review of this plan;
- f. Support a range of housing tenures, types and sizes measured against targets to provide:
 - i. 33% of all homes over the plan period as Affordable Housing for local needs with targets to deliver up to 40% Affordable Housing where viable;
 - ii. A broadly even split between smaller (1- and 2-bed) and larger (3+

¹⁷ These requirements include a small buffer over and above the targets identified in criteria (a) and (b) to ensure sufficient flexibility. See Monitoring and Delivery chapter for further information.

- bed) properties; and
- iii. 100 plots for self-build development over the plan period; and
- g. Provide up to 350 bed spaces in suitable, supported accommodation to meet the needs of those who cannot live in their own home.

- SP8.1 The need for housing is one of the biggest issues for Local Plans to address. A balance needs to be struck between the large and pressing need for housing with the desirability of protecting the countryside. Green Belt boundaries in North Hertfordshire were last reviewed between 1984 and 1992. At that time access to housing was comparatively much easier than it is today, especially for younger newly-forming households.
- SP8.2 Our evidence identified a requirement for 14,400 homes to be built between 2011 and 2031 to meet the needs of North Hertfordshire¹⁸. A modest uplift has been added. This predominantly reflects the fact that, as people live for longer and live in their own homes for longer, it may be more appropriate to assume that more of their needs will be met in the normal housing stock¹⁹.
- SP8.3 It is also necessary to consider the wider needs of housing market areas which affect North Hertfordshire. In particular, the Luton housing market area covers parts of North Hertfordshire, and the need for development in this area is significant. A contribution towards unmet needs is made by this plan.
- SP8.4 It would only be possible to deliver a modest proportion of these housing requirements on land within the village and Green Belt boundaries established in the previous District Plan²⁰. Having considered a wide range of evidence, this plan concludes that sensible, planned expansion of towns and villages is the best way of delivering the growth needed whilst protecting the largely rural character of the remainder of the District.
- SP8.5 More than 4,000 of the required homes are accounted for by completions since 2011, sites which have already obtained planning permission and other allowances. These allowances include windfalls (those sites which will continue to come forward for development outside of the local plan process) as well as broad locations. These are areas where it is reasonable to assume development might occur in the latter years of the plan, but where we cannot currently identify the exact location. The majority of these 4,000 homes will be on previously developed land.
- SP8.6 Just under half of all new homes over the plan period will be delivered on six Strategic Housing Sites removed from the Green Belt. Three of these sites adjoin some of North Hertfordshire's largest settlements – Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock.
- SP8.7 Stevenage adjoins North Hertfordshire to the south-east. The tight administrative boundaries here mean it is possible to develop two strategic sites that are within North Hertfordshire, but will integrate with the planned urban area of Stevenage.
- SP8.8 These sites will all be built wholly to meet the housing needs of North Hertfordshire.

¹⁸ Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update (ORS, 2015)

¹⁹ Housing requirements are normally calculated on the basis that the proportion of older persons needing specialised accommodation will not change over time.

²⁰ Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (NHDC, 2016)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP8.9 Luton lies immediately to the west of the District. This strategic allocation for 2,100 homes is predominantly to meet the needs of Luton, but around 150 of the homes here will contribute to North Hertfordshire's housing needs²¹.
- SP8.10 A strategic policy has been prepared for each site setting out the site-specific measures we will require. These are in addition to the general requirements on matters such as affordable housing and open space set out in the detailed policies of the plan which apply in all instances.
- SP8.11 The remainder of new homes will be delivered through a range of local housing allocations set out in the detailed policies of this plan:
- More than 900 further homes are identified within pre-existing settlement boundaries and have influenced our target to build 20% of new homes on previously developed land;
 - As part of our comprehensive review of the Green Belt, a number of additional villages have been 'inset' with boundaries drawn to release additional land for development. These locations will contribute around 2,600 homes to our target whilst also ensuring the long-term sustainability of these settlements.
 - A series of developments around the edge of Royston will contribute almost 1,000 further homes; while
 - A review of settlement boundaries in the Rural Areas Beyond the Green Belt allows for approximately 400 homes.
- SP8.12 This plan also makes provision to meet the future needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community. Existing arrangements at the Pulmer Water site near Codicote will be formalised allowing requirements over the period to 2031 to be met.
- SP8.13 These targets require housing completions within the District to accelerate well above those achieved historically. However, past rates have been constrained, in part, by tight village and Green Belt boundaries that have not been reviewed for twenty years whilst Government policy supports a 'significant boost' in the supply of housing.
- SP8.14 This needs to be balanced against realistic expectations about when we can expect to see new homes being built. This is especially the case on the largest sites which can require significant up-front investment in infrastructure such as new roads. As a result, most of the planned new homes are likely to be delivered after 2021.
- SP8.15 A stepped approach is considered most appropriate. Housing supply will be measured against targets to deliver an average of 500 homes per year over the first ten years of the plan period (2011-2021). For the period beyond 2021, a target of 1,150 homes per year will apply.
- SP8.16 As this local plan was developed, many residents suggested that a new settlement in North Hertfordshire would be the best way to meet future needs. We recognise many of the merits of this argument. In the longer term, continual incremental additions to existing settlements may not be the best solution.
- SP8.17 The Council is committed to fully exploring new settlement options in the District. Our evidence shows that we cannot expect a new settlement to make a substantial contribution to housing requirements in this plan period to 2031²².

²¹ The remaining 50 homes within the Luton Housing Market Area for North Hertfordshire's needs identified in criterion (a)(ii) will be met from local housing allocations, completions, permissions and windfalls. See Housing and Green Belt Technical Paper (NHDC, 2016).

**North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016**

- SP8.18 The outcomes of the new settlement process will be reflected in the next review of this plan. The review will supplement rather than replace the allocations in this plan and provide greater certainty for the period beyond this plan.
- SP8.19 If a new settlement is pursued, it would be unlikely to meet all future needs and it would probably still remain necessary to identify additional sites²³. This issue is exacerbated by the constrained nature of some surrounding authorities. Stevenage Borough's current plan strategy is likely to leave only limited development opportunities within their administrative area by 2031²⁴.
- SP8.20 Land to the west of the A1(M) at Stevenage within North Hertfordshire has long been identified as a sustainable location for a substantial urban extension to the town. Given the history of this site, it is considered there is sufficient justification to remove this site from the Green Belt now and safeguard it for future use. No development will be permitted until a plan review determines that the site is required to meet long-term needs and remains (part of) the most appropriate solution.
- SP8.21 In taking this approach, it is recognised that a review of this local plan will need to conclude before the end of the plan period in 2031. It is reasonable to assume that some development will be realised from whichever sites are identified through this process in the period after 2026. An allowance of 500 homes has been included in our housing figures.
- SP8.22 The Monitoring and Delivery chapter of this plan sets out in greater detail how we expect the local plan review process to occur.
- SP8.23 As well as setting targets for the amounts of housing, it is vital that the local plan sets clear expectations as to the types of homes that will be built.
- SP8.24 The price of housing in North Hertfordshire is a key issue and many local residents are unable to afford housing without some form of assistance. At least one out of every three new homes built over the plan period will be Affordable Housing²⁵ to meet local needs. This will be achieved through a tiered approach requiring up to 40% provision on allocated sites, with 100% affordable schemes appropriate in some instances.
- SP8.25 Self-build provides another route to home ownership. On strategic sites, 1% of plots will be reserved for people with a local connection who wish to build their own home. No specific self-build targets have been set on Local Housing Allocation sites and local demand will be considered on a site-by-site basis having regards to the Council's self-build register. Self build may additionally be an issue that local communities wish to explore through Neighbourhood Plans.
- SP8.26 Detailed policies will ensure that development sites deliver an appropriate range of property sizes. Sites in the most accessible locations will generally be expected to provide smaller units at higher densities while we will also ensure appropriate levels of provision for the family market.

²² North Hertfordshire New Settlement Study (ATLAS, 2016)

²³ Long-term Government household and population projections, which form the starting point for consideration of local plan housing targets, continue to predict substantial growth within North Hertfordshire well beyond 2031.

²⁴ Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031: Publication draft (Stevenage Borough Council, 2016)

²⁵ This term is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF.

**North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016**

SP8.27 We also need to provide the right sort of homes for older residents. Up to 650 bed spaces of specialist accommodation may be required²⁶. However, this needs to be viewed in the context of changes in the ways in which older people might seek to live, and in which providers might seek to deliver services over the plan period. A slightly lower requirement has been set, offset against the additional requirement for 'mainstream' housing identified in paragraph SP8.2.

SP8.28 Our Sustainability Appraisal concludes that this policy provides clarity about the scale and location of housing which will be delivered in North Hertfordshire up to 2031. As well as securing long-term housing supply, stipulating the type and mix of housing required, the policy should help to support economic growth in the District through increasing local demand and spend and by creating jobs in construction and other development-related industry.

DRAFT

²⁶ Stevenage and North Hertfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment Update (ORS, 2015)

Design

Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability

The Council considers good design to be a key aspect of sustainable development. We will

- a. Support new development where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context;
- b. Require masterplans for significant developments;
- c. Assess proposals against detailed policy requirements set out in this plan and the Design SPD; and
- d. Adopt the Government's technical standards for the size of new homes, water efficiency and, in specified circumstances, accessibility.

- SP9.1 Design is central to good planning. The achievement of high quality, sustainable design is required by Government guidance. Planning policies should promote high quality, inclusive design in layouts and buildings in terms of function and impact. Design which does not make the most of opportunities to improve the character and quality of an area should be refused.
- SP9.2 North Hertfordshire has a high quality natural and built environment. Promoting sustainable growth is one of the priorities for the District. Achieving this objective depends on securing development that is of a high quality and inclusive design which reinforces local distinctiveness through fully addressing the creation of a sense of place and a safe and healthy environment.
- SP9.3 North Hertfordshire is fortunate in having three historic market towns, the world's first Garden City and many villages all with unique characters set in a high quality rural environment. As development pressures increase in the District it is important to respect, retain and where possible enhance the existing character of both the urban and rural areas to maintain the quality of the District's environment.
- SP9.4 The largest sites will be masterplanned in accordance with any requirements set out in Policies SP14 to SP19 and the Communities section of this plan to maximise their benefits.
- SP9.5 The detailed policies of this plan and supplementary guidance set out standards that will apply to new development in the District. Government reforms and technical standards have streamlined the type and amount of additional requirements that we can ask of new development. Having regard to relevant evidence, we consider it appropriate to introduce these standardised requirements in North Hertfordshire.
- SP9.6 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that this policy with its broad strategic approach should help to ensure that the plan delivers against a number of the sustainability appraisal framework objectives and is particularly important given the scale of new development proposed by this plan.

Healthy Communities

Policy SP10: Healthy Communities

We will provide and maintain healthy, inclusive communities for our residents. We will

- a. Support the retention of existing community, cultural, leisure or recreation facilities;
- b. Require appropriate levels of new community, cultural, leisure and built sport & recreation facilities to be provided in new development;
- c. Work with the NHS Trust, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and other relevant providers to ensure appropriate coverage of healthcare facilities across the District;
- d. Maintain the network of local retail centres identified in Policy SP4 and support the retention of locally-important shops;
- e. Work with Hertfordshire County Council and education providers to ensure the planning system contributes to the provision of sufficient school places and facilitates the provision of new or expanded schools in appropriate and accessible locations; and
- f. Protect, enhance and create new physical and green infrastructure to foster healthy lifestyles.

- SP10.1 National policy recognises that the planning system plays a role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities. Community and recreation facilities together with green spaces can play an important role in the life of local people enabling people not only to participate in physical activities but also in cultural pastimes, all of which can help to enhance physical, spiritual and mental well being. Community, leisure, recreation and cultural facilities can include village halls, community centres, sports halls, theatres, museums, libraries, places of worship, doctors and dental surgeries and schools. Retail facilities in the towns and villages are afforded protection by Policy SP4.
- SP10.2 Community provision requires partnership with key agencies. A number of community halls, for example, are owned and / or operated by parish councils.
- SP10.3 Our general presumption will be that existing facilities should be retained. However, there may be exceptions to this. Where facilities are being replaced, are not in the right location to address future patterns of demand, or are no longer viable in their current form some limited losses of existing premises will be permitted.
- SP10.4 Our detailed policies set out our approach to considering applications, including proposals affecting Assets of Community Value.
- SP10.5 The East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust are responsible for hospital services. Health care delivered through GP surgeries and other secondary facilities is primarily managed by the East and North Hertfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group. The largest sites will be expected to make appropriate provision for new, on-site healthcare facilities.
- SP10.6 Most of the District operates a two-tier education system, with children attending primary schools from ages 4-11 and secondary schools from ages 11-16 (and up to 18 where sixth-form provision is made).
- SP10.7 The east of the District operates a three-tier system of lower (ages 5-9), middle (9-13) and upper (13-16/18) schools. This system is also used in neighbouring

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

Bedfordshire. On sites close or adjacent to the County boundary, consideration will need to be given as to the most appropriate forms of provision or contribution.

- SP10.8 At the same time, the Government's changes may allow for more innovative and flexible approaches to school provision in the future. Concepts such as 'all through schools' – which provide education for all ages from 4 to at least 16 – may be appropriate in certain locations, including the largest development sites. This approach might also enable more sustainable travel patterns by providing modest levels of secondary school provision in locations where children currently have to travel further afield.
- SP10.9 We will work with the County Council, landowners, Academy Trusts and other relevant bodies to deliver appropriate solutions. Our Strategic Housing Sites will see the on-site provision of new primary and, where appropriate, secondary school facilities to serve the growing population. Some Local Housing Allocations will also result in new school places being provided, including at Ickleford, Codicote and Knebworth.
- SP10.10 The NPPF addresses the importance that access to open space has for the health and wellbeing of a community. Physical infrastructure, for instance walking and cycling routes, can have dual benefits of improving health through exercise, whilst sustainable modes of transport also lessen the impact on the natural environment. Green infrastructure assets can also be a driver for economic growth and investment.
- SP10.11 The towns and villages of North Hertfordshire are attractive places in which to live and work. The green infrastructure network forms an essential part of the quality and character of the settlements, providing accessible formal recreation opportunities, informal open space, wildlife habitats and links to the countryside. During the plan period up to 2031 the District will need to accommodate housing growth and it is important that the green infrastructure network is protected where possible, and opportunities are taken to enhance the network to ensure that the settlements remain attractive and healthy places to live.
- SP10.12 In promoting the creation of healthy communities, the NPPF states that local authorities should identify specific needs, qualitative and quantitative deficits and any surpluses in open space provision, as well as any open space that is required. These requirements are set out in the detailed policies.
- SP10.13 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that this policy is critical to the delivery of a number of the social and environmental sub-objectives in the sustainability appraisal framework.

Natural and Historic Environment

Policy SP11: Natural Resources and Sustainability

This plan seeks to meet the challenges of climate change and flooding. We will:

- a. Support proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development in appropriate locations;
- b. Take a risk based approach to development and flood risk, directing development to areas at lowest risk in accordance with the NPPF and ensuring the provision of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and other appropriate measures;
- c. Support the principles of the Water Framework Directive and seek to protect, enhance and manage the water environment; and
- d. Give consideration to the potential or actual impact of land contamination and support proposals that involve the remediation of contaminated land.

- SP11.1 To assist in securing radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, the Council is required to help increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy. Proposals for renewable and low carbon energy will be favourably considered subject to consideration of the impacts. A balance needs to be struck between the beneficial outcomes of renewable energy, and any adverse impacts produced by the development itself.
- SP11.2 Risk of flooding can arise from a number of sources including river flooding, surface water runoff, sewer or groundwater flooding. Within North Hertfordshire there are a number of rivers and streams. Localised flooding has also occurred away from those water courses.
- SP11.3 Our evidence has identified those areas of the District most at risk from flooding²⁷. Development allocations have been identified in line with its recommendations. Where necessary, specific mitigation measures have been identified while our detailed policies set out the general requirements that will apply in all cases.
- SP11.4 This includes the provision of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). SUDS are an important flood risk mitigation measure to manage surface water run-off. They can take a variety of forms, including green roofs, swales, permeable pavements and retention ponds and, when well designed, integrate with wider green infrastructure provision (see Policy SP12).
- SP11.5 This plan also seeks to have regard to the wider water environment. The Water Framework Directive (WFD)²⁸ is a piece of European legislation that requires member states to make plans to protect and improve the water environment. It seeks to improve the condition of all qualifying water bodies to a “good” status and prevent deterioration in the water environment.
- SP11.6 North Hertfordshire is located at the watershed between the Great Ouse and Thames river catchments. Headwaters of river catchments are, by their nature, small in terms of volume. This means that environmental capacity for change can be limited.

²⁷ Strategic Flood Risk Assessment update (North Hertfordshire District Council, 2016)

²⁸ For information on the Water Framework Directive, see: <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/33362.aspx>

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP11.7 Water Cycle Studies have been produced for both the Rye Meads catchment area²⁹ and Royston³⁰, where identified foul treatment infrastructure issues have arisen as a result of potential future development. Both studies identify that technical solutions can be realised. Where appropriate, contributions will be sought and / or conditions used in accordance with Policy SP7.
- SP11.8 Much of North Hertfordshire's water supply comes from an unconfined aquifer sited beneath the District. We will ensure that development does not have an adverse impact upon groundwater.
- SP11.9 This approach should prevent pollution of the water environment. However, it is also important to have regard to pollution and contamination in a broader context.
- SP11.10 There are numerous sites in the District which are potentially affected by contamination as a consequence of their historic land uses. Our detailed policies set out the approach we will take to (potentially) contaminated sites and polluting uses.
- SP11.11 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that this policy supports a number of the sustainability appraisal framework objectives.

Policy SP12: Green infrastructure, Biodiversity and Landscape

We will accommodate significant growth during the plan period whilst ensuring the natural environment is protected and enhanced. We will:

- a. Protect, enhance and manage the green infrastructure network and seek opportunities to create new green infrastructure;
- b. Protect, enhance and manage biodiversity networks including wetland and riverine habitats, Locally Important Geological Sites (LIGS) and seek opportunities for net gains for biodiversity; and
- c. Consider and respect landscape character and locally sensitive features, particularly in relation to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- SP12.1 North Hertfordshire has a varied and attractive natural environment which is under increasing pressure from development, recreational uses and changing agricultural practices, particularly in the areas which are adjacent to the towns and villages.
- SP12.2 The natural environment forms the setting to the towns and villages in which people live, work and spend their leisure time. Where possible, it should be protected and enhanced in the future to maintain the existing high quality of life that people in the District enjoy.
- SP12.3 Green infrastructure refers to all assets within and between towns and villages, both urban and rural. It is a network of multi-functional open spaces, including urban parks, gardens, woodlands, hedgerows, watercourses and associated buffer zones, and green corridors in addition to protected sites, nature reserves and open countryside.
- SP12.4 Benefits to be gained from green infrastructure include a healthy environment, improved biodiversity value, climate change mitigation and flood attenuation as well as enhanced networks for walking and cycling, which contributes to a carbon neutral development. The retention of substantial connected networks of green

²⁹ Rye Meads Water Cycle Strategy (Hyder, 2009); Rye Meads Water Cycle Strategy Review (Stevenage Borough Council, 2015)

³⁰ Royston Sewage Treatment Work Water Cycle Study (NHDC, 2012)

space in urban, urban fringe and adjacent countryside areas to serve growing communities is vitally important in ensuring these benefits are maximised.

- SP12.5 Our detailed policies set out our approach to green infrastructure provision in new developments.
- SP12.6 There are a wide range of important habitats within North Hertfordshire, including hedgerows, wildflower meadows, orchards, ponds, lakes, reed bed and fen, ancient woodlands in the south, chalk grasslands and chalk streams in the east and wet woodlands along the River Hiz and its tributaries. Many of these habitats are subject to specific designations, reflecting their value in terms wildlife interest, for instance national sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves, and local sites such as local wildlife sites.
- SP12.7 North Hertfordshire is also host to a number of Locally Important Geological Sites (LIGS), which are identified as the most important sites for geology not covered by land protection designations, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Our detailed policies set out the designations for biodiversity and geodiversity assets.
- SP12.8 Much of North Hertfordshire is largely unspoilt, very attractive landscape encompassing a range of natural, man-made and urban & rural spaces. The natural landscape to the west of Hitchin towards Hexton and Lilley follows the escarpment of the Chiltern Hills and part of the District here falls within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There are also locally important landscapes which contribute to a feeling of remoteness in other parts of the District, for example Lilley Bottom and the East Anglian Heights. Our detailed policies set out how we expect landscape issues to be taken into account.
- SP12.9 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that our policy directly addresses the environmental protection objectives as set out in our sustainability appraisal and recognises the need to provide environmental protection in the context of accommodating significant growth.

Policy SP13: Historic Environment

The Council will balance the need for growth with the proper protection and enhancement of the historic environment. We will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through:

- a. Maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting;
- b. Identifying sites on the national register of Heritage at Risk or the local risk register;
- c. Periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and other locally designated assets; and
- d. Publication of detailed guidance

- SP13.1 The District has a rich built heritage with many ancient monuments (many being associated with the prehistoric Icknield Way), 44 conservation areas and over 2,500 listed buildings.
- SP13.2 These factors make a strong positive contribution to North Hertfordshire, but can be among the most vulnerable features of the District when major development is proposed.
- SP13.3 National policy seeks to conserve the historic environment which contributes to the local distinctiveness of the area, but also to facilitate development where it would not lead to substantial harm. In addition to this, the historic environment is among

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

environmental matters that must be considered when pursuing sustainable development The Council will take a positive and pro-active approach to this historic environment.

SP13.4 Heritage assets in North Hertfordshire include:

- Over 2,500 Listed Buildings
- 44 Conservation Areas
- 13 Registered Parks and Gardens
- 62 Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- Over 1,000 sites of Archaeological Interest

SP13.1 Listed Buildings are designated by central Government. With the District's fine urban and rural history, the statutory list includes buildings and structures of a wide range of sizes, ages, types and uses and of varying architectural styles, methods of construction and materials, both local and imported.

SP13.2 Of those listed within North Hertfordshire, 26 buildings have the highest Grade I listing. This includes Hitchin Priory, Wymondley Bury and a number of parish churches. A further 105 are Grade II* listed, including Royston Manor House.

SP13.3 The forty-four Conservation Areas in North Hertfordshire include (parts of) settlements of varying characters from the historic linear core of Barkway to the original town centre and residential neighbourhoods of Letchworth Garden City.

SP13.4 Conservation Areas are designated under separate legislation to that which is used for local plans. Appraisal and review can therefore take place on a rolling-basis alongside and / or outside of the Local Plan process.

SP13.5 Over the lifetime of this plan, we will carry out a programme of work relating to our Conservation Areas with priority for locations with potential development pressures and where there have been significant changes since the designation was first made. The reviews will include the production of character statements and will provide opportunities to consider amending boundaries.

SP13.6 We will consider the need to develop supplementary guidance for Conservation Areas in the form of management plans. Where this is pursued, it will become a material consideration in the determination of relevant applications.

SP13.7 Historic England maintains a national register of Heritage at risk for sites that are most at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development. The council will also explore, with parish councils and designated neighbourhood planning groups, the possibility of developing a list of locally designated heritage assets at risk. If implemented, we would work with Historic England, owners and occupiers to find new, appropriate uses and solution to secure the future of heritage assets.

SP13.8 Historic assets can also form part of the green infrastructure network. Of the thirteen Registered Parks and Gardens in the District, one is Grade I (St Paul's Walden Bury); one is Grade II* (Knebworth Park) and eleven are Grade II (including Hexton Manor and Ashwell Bury). These sites contain listed buildings and so also form part of their setting. The registered sites are of varying ages and character dating from the 18th century through to the early 20th century. Historic England's advice suggests about two-thirds of the sites on the register are of national significance.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP13.9 Working with the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust and based on its advice the Council will, where possible, identify other sites of interest. These will be added to the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) and will be considered by the Council as non-designated heritage assets, as defined in the NPPF, and given appropriate consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- SP13.10 In addition, because there are no special controls for works within historic parks and gardens, we will consider serving Tree Preservation Orders outside conservation areas where the character of a site may be threatened by the loss of important trees.
- SP13.11 North Hertfordshire has an especially rich archaeological heritage, including Archaeology Areas and Areas of Archaeological Interest.
- SP13.12 There is archaeological evidence of human activity from early prehistoric times but with the District probably being best known for its late Iron Age and Roman remains.
- SP13.13 In addition, there are Iron Age hill forts, a number of important ancient roads and routes including the Icknield Way and Roman Ermine Street and small mediaeval castles and moated manor sites.
- SP13.14 As well as the sixty-one scheduled ancient monuments there are a number of sites within the District that have been identified as being of comparable national importance to the sixty-one scheduled ancient monuments.
- SP13.15 In accordance with the NPPF, these will be considered in the same way as scheduled sites in the determination of development proposals. Many other sites of interest are known and new sites are becoming known on a regular basis. Because of this, a finite list of sites and their areas cannot be identified. Sites of interest are included in the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record, which is updated on an annual basis.
- SP13.16 The Council recognises the importance of these heritage assets and has additionally been developing and adopting Registers of Buildings of Local Importance on a parish by parish basis in conjunction with Conservation Area reviews.
- SP13.17 The detailed policies of this plan identify those sites where impact upon the historic environment must be carefully managed.
- SP13.18 Our Sustainability Appraisal says that our policy directly addresses the sustainability appraisal framework objectives relating to the protection, conservation and enhancement of heritage assets and landscapes.

Strategic Housing Sites

The following policies identify our Strategic Housing Sites and set out site-specific measures to be addressed in any proposals. These are in addition to matters set out in the detailed policies of this plan, such as affordable housing and open space, which apply in all cases.

The supporting text to Policy SP8 sets out the key findings of our Sustainability Appraisal in relation to housing. Each Strategic Housing Site has additionally been subject to an individual appraisal which has informed the policies below. Further details can be found in the Environmental Report, which should be referred to for more information³¹.

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³¹ Sustainability Appraisal (CAG, 2016)

Policy SP14: Site BA1 – North of Baldock

Land to the north of Baldock, as shown on the Proposals Map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for a new neighbourhood of approximately 2,800 homes. Planning permission for residential-led development will be granted where the following site-specific requirements are met:

- a. A site masterplan to be approved prior to the submission of any detailed matters;
- b. A new local centre along with additional neighbourhood-level provision providing around 500m² (net) class A1 convenience retail provision and 1,400m² (net) of other A-class floorspace;
- c. Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into surrounding landscape and to reinforce a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary to the north and east;
- d. A new link road connecting the A507 London Road to the A505 Baldock bypass including a new bridge across the railway;
- e. Sustainable transport measures to include:
 - i. A secondary rail crossing for pedestrians and cyclists in the vicinity of Ashville Way;
 - ii. Safe access routes to / from, and upgrades to, Baldock station;
 - iii. Sensitive integration of Bridleway Baldock 034 / Bygrave 002 as a north-south route through the development; and
 - iv. The use of Bygrave Road / Ashwell Road from the south-western edge of the allocated site to the link road as a sustainable transport corridor
- f. At least 28 serviced plots for self-build development;
- g. A community hall and GP surgery;
- h. Up to 6 forms of entry (FE) of additional primary-age and secondary-age education provision;
- i. Address existing surface water flood risk issues, particularly to the south of Ashwell Road, through SUDs or other appropriate solution;
- j. Appropriate mitigation, compensation and / or enhancement of key features of biodiversity including:
 - i. Ivel Springs Local Nature Reserve;
 - ii. Bygrave Road local wildlife site; and
 - iii. Identified protected species and priority habitats;
- k. Built development contained to the south and south-west of the ridgeline that generally extends eastwards from the A507 south of Blackhorse Farm and southwards from Ashwell Road; and
- l. Sensitive treatment of heritage assets and their settings including:
 - i. An access solution from the A507 London Road which satisfactorily addresses potential impacts;
 - ii. Retaining framed views of St Mary's Church from within and beyond the site; and
 - iii. Using the location of areas of archaeological significance to inform a site-wide green infrastructure strategy.

SP14.1 Land to the north of Baldock is the largest, single development site allocated through this plan. A total of 2,800 homes can be accommodated here, 2,500 of which are anticipated to be built within the plan period to 2031.

SP14.2 The location of the site, and the way in which Baldock has historically developed, enables substantial new development within relatively close proximity to both the train station and Baldock town centre.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP14.3 This site enables growth to meet needs arising from the surrounding areas in such a way that does not erode the narrow gaps between the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City and Baldock.
- SP14.4 The site is also large enough to support new schools, local facilities and a new link road, including an additional road bridge over the railway so that not all traffic has to use the Station Road bridge and the White Horse crossroads.
- SP14.5 A range of sustainable transport measures will be required. Critically, this will include measures that allow safe access to the northern side of Baldock station and the town centre as well as routes through the development to provide access to the wider countryside for all Baldock residents.
- SP14.6 To the north, the allocation extends to the line of Bridleway Bygrave 001. This right of way is considered the most appropriate long-term, defensible boundary for the Green Belt³². Additional planting may be required to reinforce its role. However, there is a clear ridgeline located approximately 200 metres to the south of this which is considered the most appropriate limit for built development.
- SP14.7 To the south of the ridgeline, the site faces towards the existing town. To the north it relates to the countryside beyond. This area would be most appropriate for the provision of some types of open space, school playing fields and / or replacement habitat where it creates an appropriate transition between the rural and urban.
- SP14.8 Along the eastern edge, the boundary to the north of Ashwell Road is defined by a field boundary hedgerow which should be reinforced. The boundary and ridgeline to the south of Ashwell Road are less well defined.
- SP14.9 The masterplanning process should address these issues and, where possible, mitigate against adverse impacts upon the wider landscape.
- SP14.10 The site and surrounding area has been specifically identified as (potentially) hosting a variety of habitats and species protected by legislation. This includes the corn bunting³³. Appropriate measures will be required as part of any application. This may range from the localised retention of habitats on-site to biodiversity offsetting. This is where habitats lost are re-provided at an appropriate alternate location.
- SP14.11 Baldock and its surrounds are home to a wide-range of heritage assets. This includes sites associated with ancient settlements, the town centre Conservation Area and a range of individually listed buildings.

³² Green Belt Review (NHDC, 2016)

³³ Blackhorse Farm, Baldock. Guidance Note; Corn Bunting (BSG Ecology, 2016)

Policy SP15: Site LG1 – North of Letchworth Garden City

Land to the north of Letchworth Garden City, as shown on the proposals map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for approximately 900 homes. Planning permission for residential development will be granted where the following site-specific requirements are met:

- a. A site masterplan to be approved prior to the submission of any detailed matters which also sets out:
 - i. How the site will follow and implement Garden City principles;
 - ii. The most appropriate points of vehicular access;
 - iii. An appropriate education solution with a presumption in favour of on-site provision of a new primary school; and
 - iv. Any measures required to address nearby heritage assets including the Scheduled Ancient Monument at Radwell Lodge and the Croft Lane and Norton Conservation Areas;
- b. Neighbourhood-level retail and community facilities providing around 900m² (net) of A-class floorspace;
- c. At least 9 serviced plots for self-build development;
- d. Incorporate ordinary watercourses (and any appropriate measures) within comprehensive green infrastructure and / or SUDs approach;
- e. Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into the surrounding landscape and a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary, particularly to the north-west and east;
- f. Diversion and / or re-provision of the Letchworth Greenway to provide a revised route around the new urban edge;

SP15.1 Letchworth holds a special place as the world's first garden city. Although development of the town to Ebenezer Howard's original vision of 32,000 residents has been achieved, it is considered there remains scope for a sensitive extension of the town to the north, which respects the town's original ideals while making provision for the needs of the 21st Century. A masterplan will be required for this site which demonstrates how these principles will be incorporated.

SP15.2 The masterplan will also be required to demonstrate an access solution which works in both highway and urban design terms. Previous work has shown that a new access from Stotfold Road could be accommodated in landscape terms³⁴. However, this needs to be balanced against a requirement to properly integrate this site with the existing Garden City. At the same time, any impacts upon the existing local highway network need to be managed within acceptable limits.

SP15.3 Sites at this scale generate enough demand to support the provision of new primary schools on-site. The presumption is that site LG1 will follow this principle. However, the irregular shape of the site and the location of surrounding schools and an existing reserve school site in the area mean that this requires further consideration.

SP15.4 Although this site will not generate a requirement for a local centre which forms part of the formal retail hierarchy, it will be necessary to provide neighbourhood-level shops and facilities to ensure that the new development is sustainable.

SP15.5 This site forms part of the elevated northerly edge to Letchworth. Much of the site is relatively flat though falls away to the north-west towards Pix Brook and to the north / north east to the Ivel Valley, with several ordinary watercourses on the site draining broadly in these directions.

³⁴ Land north of Letchworth: landscape sensitivity study (LUC, 2013)

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP15.6 Our evidence shows that, within the plateau on which most of the site sits, there is only low landscape sensitivity to development. In the peripheral areas, there are views across a much wider landscape which continues into neighbouring Central Bedfordshire³⁵.
- SP15.7 Although parts of the north-eastern boundary are quite clearly defined, there are currently limited features demarcating the north-west and eastern edges of the site. These should be addressed in a comprehensive strategy which limits any harm to the wider landscape and preserves the setting of nearby heritage assets whilst creating new defensible limits to the town
- SP15.8 The Letchworth Greenway is an off-road circular route around the edge of the town. It was constructed in 2003 to celebrate the town's centenary. Development of this site will result in incorporation of part of the existing Greenway into the urban area. These affected sections should be re-routed and re-provided as part of any application. The possibility of providing radial link paths from the existing urban area, through the site to the Greenway (and beyond) should be explored as part of a comprehensive green infrastructure strategy.

³⁵ Land north of Letchworth: landscape sensitivity study (LUC, 2013)

Policy SP16: Site NS1 – North of Stevenage

Land to the north of Stevenage within Graveley parish, as shown on the proposals map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for approximately 900 homes. Planning permission for residential development will be granted where the following site-specific requirements are met:

- a. A site masterplan to be approved prior to the submission of any detailed matters;
- b. Integration with adjoining development in Stevenage Borough including site-wide solutions for access, education and retail;
- c. An upgraded junction at the intersection of Graveley Road / North Road;
- d. A detailed drainage strategy identifying water infrastructure required and mechanism(s) for delivery.
- e. At least 9 serviced plots for self-build development;
- f. Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into surrounding landscape and a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary to the north;
- g. Integration of existing public rights of way to provide routes through the site to the wider countryside including
 - i. Footpath Graveley 006 and Bridleway Graveley 008 along the perimeter of the site; and
 - ii. Footpath Graveley 007 as a south-east to north-west route through the site and link path from the urban area to the Stevenage Outer Orbital Path; and
- h. Sensitive consideration of existing settlements, landscape features and heritage assets including
 - i. Graveley village and Conservation Area;
 - ii. The St Nicholas & Rectory Lane Conservation Area; and
 - iii. Chesfield Park

SP16.1 The area north of Stevenage is currently undeveloped farm land in the parish of Graveley. Adjoining land within Stevenage Borough to the south has been identified for development and this provides an opportunity for a coherent extension of the town to the north³⁶. A masterplanning exercise for this site will need to consider the implications of these cross-boundary allocations and demonstrate appropriate solutions. This may lead to some facilities which will serve the whole development being located wholly within either North Hertfordshire's or Stevenage's administrative areas.

SP16.2 It is envisaged that principal access to the site will be in the form of a looped estate road, one end of which will be in Stevenage Borough. The northern end of this road will emerge at, or close to, the existing junction of the B197 at Graveley Road / North Road. A new arrangement, possibly a roundabout, will need to be provided.

SP16.3 Existing field boundaries in this area are generally quite well defined. However, in order to preserve the setting and separation of Graveley village and its Conservation Area, it is considered most appropriate to draw back the allocation and Green Belt boundaries to a new alignment. This will require new planting and sensitive design and layout to preserve the setting of the Conservation Area.

SP16.4 These perimeter areas also incorporate statutory rights of way which should be retained. A further footpath bisects the development and this should be incorporated as a green route from the Stevenage urban area, through the development site to the countryside beyond.

³⁶ Stevenage Borough Local Plan 2011-2031: Publication Draft (SBC, 2016)

**North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016**

SP16.5 This route also forms a recognised link to the Stevenage Outer Orbital Path (StOOP). StOOP is a 27-mile walking route around the town using footpaths and other routes that are open to the public.

SP16.6 To the south-east of the site, the adjoining land within Stevenage Borough is known colloquially as 'Forster Country' in recognition of author EM Forster. His childhood home is listed with its setting protected by a Conservation Area.

SP16.7 To the east lies Chesfield Park. Although not formally recognised through statutory listings or registers, the house and surrounding parkland are important local features. These are generally well separated from the allocated site by an existing tree belt but the transition between these areas will need to be considered.

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Policy SP17: Site HT1 – Highover Farm, Hitchin

Land to the east of Hitchin, as shown on the proposals map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for approximately 700 homes. Planning permission for residential development will be granted where the following site-specific requirements are met:

- a. Neighbourhood-level retail facilities providing approximately 500m² (net) of A-class floorspace;
- b. Principal access from Stotfold Road with appropriate integration to the local highway network;
- c. At least 7 serviced plots for self-build development;
- d. On-site provision of a new primary school;
- e. Appropriate separation distances from the adjoining railway embankment to safeguard residential amenity; and
- f. Lower density development and / or green infrastructure provision at the north of the site to:
 - i. Maintain appropriate visual and physical separation between Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City;
 - ii. Address surface water flood risk; and
 - iii. Respect the setting of the scheduled barrows to the north-east

- SP17.1 The land at Highover Farm provides opportunity for a strategic-scale site on the edge of Hitchin to address locally arising needs.
- SP17.2 Although this site will not generate a requirement for a local centre which forms part of the formal retail hierarchy, it will be necessary to provide neighbourhood-level shops and facilities to ensure that the new development is sustainable.
- SP17.3 This development will necessitate a new principal access from Stotfold Road. However, it is important to ensure that this does not result in new development 'turning its back' on the remainder of Hitchin.
- SP17.4 A site at this scale will generate sufficient demand to support a new primary school on site. This will need to be at least 1FE in size. Further information on likely pupil yields, along with an understanding of any extent to which the nearby Highover JMI School may be able to meet future demands, will determine if it is necessary to secure a 2FE school on-site.
- SP17.5 A number of existing roads run to the edge of the allocated land, including Highover Way and High Dane. These provide opportunities to integrate development with the surrounding area whilst ensuring that any such routes do not create an alternate access from Stotfold Road to the industrial areas located between the railway lines
- SP17.6 The most appropriate solutions will be determined through the Development Management process having regard to the detailed policies of this plan.
- SP17.7 Although the gap between Hitchin and Letchworth Garden City is relatively narrow in this location, it is considered that Stotfold Road and the Cambridge railway provide definitive, defensible boundaries. Notwithstanding this point, it will be necessary to demonstrate an appropriate design solution as the site tapers to its northern end to respect this separation and nearby heritage assets.

Policy SP18: Site GA2 – Land off Mendip Way

Land to the north-east of Great Ashby within Weston parish, as shown on the proposals map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for approximately 600 homes. Planning permission for residential development will be granted where the following site-specific requirements are met:

- a. Neighbourhood-level retail facilities providing approximately 500m² (net) of A1-class floorspace;
- b. Up to four hectares of land for education purposes subject to up-to-date assessments of need including, at minimum, 2FE of primary-age provision;
- c. Principal access from Mendip Way;
- d. A detailed drainage strategy identifying water infrastructure required and mechanism(s) for delivery.
- e. At least 6 serviced plots for self-build development;
- f. Structural planting along the alignment of footpath Weston 044 to reinforce the revised Green Belt boundary and mitigate landscape impacts;
- g. Address existing surface water flood risk issues, particularly running south-east from Dell Spring to Newberry Grove, through SUDs or other appropriate solution;
- h. Appropriate mitigation, compensation and / or enhancement of key features of biodiversity including:
 - i. Local wildlife sites at Tilekiln Wood, Parsonsgreen Wood, New Spring Wood, Brooches Wood and Claypithills Spring Wood; and
 - ii. Identified protected species and priority habitats;
- i. Integration of existing public rights of way within and adjoining the site to provide routes to the wider countryside including
 - i. Footpaths Weston 027 and Weston 044 and Bridleway Weston 033 as features which help define the perimeters of the site; and
 - ii. Footpath Weston 029 as a potential green corridor through the site;
- j. Provision of a green infrastructure corridor beneath the current alignment of the pylon lines; and
- k. Lower intensity development and / or green infrastructure provision to the north of the site to minimise harm to the setting of listed buildings.

- SP18.1 Great Ashby is a relatively new parish, representing the residential area adjoining Stevenage that has been substantially completed since the turn of the century. For the purposes of our settlement hierarchy it is considered to be a town.
- SP18.2 Land to the north-east of the existing settlement limits is identified for the development of approximately 600 homes within the parish of Weston.
- SP18.3 Although this site will not generate a requirement for a local centre which forms part of the formal retail hierarchy, it will be necessary to provide neighbourhood-level shops and facilities to ensure that the new development is sustainable.
- SP18.4 Great Ashby's existing primary school is significantly oversubscribed. As a consequence, it draws its intake from a very tight catchment area. There is also no local secondary school and Hertfordshire County Council has identified future pressures on secondary-age provision in the Stevenage area as a key concern.
- SP18.5 Development of this site provides the opportunity to address these issues. 2FE of primary-age provision will exceed the requirements arising from the site itself and help alleviate pressures arising from existing and planned development in Great Ashby.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

- SP18.6 We will continue to work with the landowner and County Council to explore options for secondary school provision in this area. A modest level of secondary-age provision, potentially in the form of an all-through school, could provide a local solution for Great Ashby and create a more sustainable residential neighbourhood at the north-east of Stevenage.
- SP18.7 The revised Green Belt boundary has been drawn along the route of a public right of way. Although a clearly defined feature, parts of its alignment cut across open fields. Structural planting here will reinforce the boundary as well as providing visual containment of the development.
- SP18.8 Distinct areas of woodland lie between the site and the existing development at Great Ashby. These should be sensitively incorporated into the development having regard to their status as local wildlife sites. These woods will be integral to the green infrastructure of the site, which will also include incorporation of key rights of way.
- SP18.9 A green infrastructure corridor currently runs through Great Ashby following the alignment of the overhead power lines. This should additionally be carried through the new development to provide a continuous link through the neighbourhood to the wider countryside.
- SP18.10 The site adjoins a number of Grade II listed buildings at Tile Kiln Farm and care should be taken in the detailed design of any scheme to ensure this area retains an appropriate setting.

Policy SP19: Sites EL1, EL2 & EL3 – East of Luton

Land to the east of Luton, as shown on the proposals map, is allocated as a Strategic Housing Site for a new neighbourhood of approximately 2,100 homes. Planning permission for residential-led development will be granted where the following site-specific measures requirements are met:

- a. A site masterplan to be approved prior to the submission of any detailed matters;
- b. A new local centre with additional neighbourhood-level provision providing around 250m² (net) class A1 convenience retail provision and 850m² of other A-class floorspace;
- c. Structural planting to create a sense of place, integration into the surrounding landscape and to reinforce a long-term, defensible Green Belt boundary to the east and mitigate landscape impacts;
- d. Principal access to be taken from Luton Road and integrated into Luton's existing highway network via Crawley Green Road;
- e. Up to 4FE of primary-age and secondary-age education provision to ensure the needs arising from this allocation can be met within the site;
- f. At least 21 serviced plots for self-build development;
- g. Built development contained within the Breachwood Ridge and avoiding adverse impacts on the wider landscape of the Lilley Valley or the Chilterns AONB;
- h. Integration of existing public rights of way within and adjoining the site to provide routes to the wider countryside including:
 - i. Footpath Offley 001 as a route from south-east Luton to the rural area; and
 - ii. Footpaths Offley 039, Offley 002 and Offley 003 as potential north-west to south-east green corridors through the site;
- i. Address existing surface water flood risk issues, particularly along the south-western perimeter of the site, through SUDs or other appropriate solution;
- j. Appropriate noise mitigation measures, to potentially include insulation and appropriate orientation of living spaces;
- k. Mitigation, compensation and / or enhancement of key features of biodiversity including:
 - i. The local wildlife sites at Stubbocks Wood; and
 - ii. Priority deciduous woodland habitat at Brickkiln Wood; and
- l. Sensitive integration of existing settlements and heritage assets, including
 - i. Minimising the visual impacts of development upon the historic parts of Cockernhoe, including relevant listed buildings;
 - ii. Using the location of the Mangrove Green and Cockernhoe areas of archaeological significance to inform a site-wide green infrastructure strategy; and
 - iii. Retaining an appropriate setting to the adjoining Putteridge Bury.

SP19.1 Three adjoining sites are identified to the east of Luton totalling 2,100 dwellings. Around 150 homes will meet requirements arising from within North Hertfordshire, with the remaining 1,950 homes addressing needs that cannot be physically accommodated within Luton.

SP19.2 Our assessment shows that the land broadly bounded by Mangrove Green, Brick Kiln Lane and Brickkiln Wood (site EL3 and parts of site EL1) is most supportable in

North Hertfordshire Local Plan
Working draft for Full Council – 20 July 2016

terms of impacts upon landscape and Green Belt. Beyond these limits, impacts become more pronounced³⁷.

- SP19.3 However, this needs to be balanced against the acute levels of unmet needs arising from Luton and the associated requirements of the NPPF and Duty to Co-operate. It is considered that the strategic allocation represents North Hertfordshire's reasonable maximum contribution³⁸.
- SP19.4 Our assessments show that this level of development can be accommodated without a significant adverse impact on the wider highway networks of Luton and Hertfordshire³⁹. This will be achieved, in part, by ensuring that education needs arising from the allocation will be met within the site itself.
- SP19.5 The eastern section of site EL1 and all of site EL2 will require sensitive design and landscaping (including structural planting) to visually contain development from longer views. The revised Green Belt boundaries predominantly follow existing, recognisable features such as roads, tree belts and rights of way. Where necessary, additional planting should be provided for reinforcement and to mitigate against impacts upon the wider landscape.
- SP19.6 The site is in close proximity to the Luton Airport noise corridors and mitigation measures may be required, particularly towards the south-east of the site which lies closest to the flight path.
- SP19.7 The allocation will adjoin existing small settlements including Cockernhoe, Mangrove Green and Tea Green as well as the registered park at Putteridge Bury. The relationship of these areas to the new development will need to be carefully considered, notably for the two greens at Cockernhoe Green and Mangrove Green.

³⁷ North Herts Site Selection Report (Peter Brett Associates, 2016)

³⁸ A review conducted by Sir Michael Heseltine suggested that authorities should "leave no stone unturned" in seeking solutions to growth. This has been broadly accepted as the benchmark against which the Duty to Co-operate is tested, especially where unmet needs exist.

³⁹ East of Luton Urban Extension Stage 2 – Traffic Modelling Results (AECOM, 2016); Preferred Local Plan Model Testing (AECOM, 2016)