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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

16 June 2023

Our Ref Cabinet/27 June 2023
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To: Members of the Cabinet:

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis (Chair), Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Amy Allen, Councillor Ruth Brown, Councillor Keith Hoskins MBE, Councillor Steve Jarvis, Councillor Sean Prendergast, Councillor Alistair Willoughby, Executive Member for Communities and Partnership

Deputy Executive Members:
Councillor Matt Barnes
Councillor Mick Debenham
Councillor Dominic Griffiths
Councillor Ian Mantle
Councillor Tamsin Thomas
Councillor Tom Tyson
Councillor Dave Winstanley

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE CABINET

to be held in the

COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF

on

TUESDAY, 27TH JUNE, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda
Part I

Item **Page**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. MINUTES - 14 MARCH 2023 (Pages 7 - 14)

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 14 March 2023.

3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency.

The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.

4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Climate Emergency

The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions.

A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste.

In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact.

The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress.

Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members

declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Any Items referred from other committees will be circulated as soon as they are available.

7. REPORT AND REFERRAL FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT & ACTION PLAN (Pages 15 - 40)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – LEGAL & COMMUNITY

In 2020 the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) undertook a review, the review report and Action Plan were agreed through Cabinet on 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020, respectively. A follow up review was undertaken by (different) LGA CPC Peers during 2022 and a further LGA Peer Committee Support report was issued in January 2023 (Appendix A). This concentrated on the Overview & Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees and a number of further recommendations have been made. These have been separated out into the Action Plan (Appendix B) with response and proposed actions for the Committees consideration and recommendations to Cabinet.

8. REPORT AND REFERRAL FROM FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE: LGA REVIEW ACTION PLAN (Pages 41 - 62)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

The Council commissioned the Local Government Association to provide peer support in relation to the impact and effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. The peer support process took place during 2022 and was a combination of a desktop review, watching meeting videos and talking to relevant Members and Officers. A report was provided to the Council in January 2023 with their findings and recommendations. This report considers the recommendations in relation to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

9. THE ALLOCATION OF DLUHC'S HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT AND DOMESTIC ABUSE FUNDING AWARDS FOR 2023/24 AND 2024/25 (Pages 63 - 74)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

This report details proposals for the allocation of this funding for specialist homelessness services for local people.

10. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND ROUND TWO (Pages 75 - 106)

REPORT OF THE MANAGING DIRECTOR

This report updates on progress with the first round allocation and Cabinet is asked to consider and decide upon the Council's response to the second round allocation.

11. LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN (LCWIP) UPDATE AND CONSULTATION REPORT (Pages 107 - 142)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

Following public consultation of the draft North Herts (LCWIP) in the autumn of 2022, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has analysed the feedback and produced a Consultation Report and a Summary of Changes Report for consideration and endorsement by North Herts Council prior to the preparation of a final draft of the LCWIP to present to HCC Highways and Transport Cabinet Panel later in the year.

12. ACTIVE NORTH HERTS STRATEGY (Pages 143 - 180)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – PLACE

To seek Cabinet's approval to adopt the new Active North Herts Strategy.

13. STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS (Pages 181 - 242)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To identify the latest position on key planning and transport issues affecting the District.

14. NORTH HERTS PLACE NARRATIVE (Pages 243 - 268)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – PLACE

To outline the Council's proposed Place Narrative for North Herts.

15. WASTE SHARED SERVICE: CLIENT TEAM AND CORPORATE SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS (Pages 269 - 312)

REPORT OF THE SHARED SERVICE MANAGER – WASTE MANAGEMENT

This report follows on from previous reports provided to Overview & Scrutiny and the Executive regarding the future management of waste.

16. ASHWELL CONSERVATION AREA (Pages 313 - 412)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To consider the representations made in response to the consultation on the draft Ashwell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) and the proposed boundary changes for the Ashwell Conservation Area.

17. PIRTON CONSERVATION AREA (Pages 413 - 510)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To consider the representations made in response to the consultation on the draft Pirton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) and the proposed boundary changes for the Pirton Conservation Area.

18. Q4 UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST THE COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 22-23 (Pages 511 - 542)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

An update on the projects, risks and performance indicators linked to delivery of the Council Plan 22-23.

19. REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2022/23 (Pages 543 - 560)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

To inform Cabinet of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure as at the end of the financial year 2022/23.

20. INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) END OF YEAR REVIEW 2022/23 (Pages 561 - 592)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

To consider the Investment Strategy (Capital and Treasury) End of Year Outturn Review.

21. YEAR END REPORT ON RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE (Pages 593 - 694)

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

A report on risk management governance at the Council for 22-23

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Council Chambers, District Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF on Tuesday, 14th March, 2023 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: *Councillors: Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Chair), (Vice-Chair), Ruth Brown, Ian Albert, Keith Hoskins, Amy Allen, Steve Jarvis and Alistair Willoughby*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Sarah Kingsley (Service Director - Place), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Deborah Coates (Principle Strategic Planning Officer), Clare Skeels (Senior Planning Officer) and Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

ALSO PRESENT:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 0 *members of the public, including registered speakers.*

169 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 3 seconds

The Chair led a Minute's silence in memory of former Councillor John Bishop.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sean Prendergast.

170 MINUTES - 31 JANUARY 2023

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 27 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Alistair Willoughby, as Deputy Executive for Housing and Environmental Health, to provide the Cabinet with an update on Local Authority Homeless Funding.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member and Deputy, as well as Officers, for their effort in acquiring funding.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 31 January 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

171 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 6 minutes 55 seconds

There was no other business notified.

172 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 6 minutes 59 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;

(2) The Chair reminded that this Members that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency. This was a serious decision and meant that, as this was an emergency, all of us, officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

(3) The Chair reminded Members to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights is set out under Chair's announcements on the Agenda.

(4) The Chair advised that for the purposes of clarification, Clause – 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution does not apply to this meeting.

173 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 8 minutes 5 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

174 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 8 minutes 9 seconds

The Chair advised that each referral would be considered under the relevant agenda item.

175 SUSTAINABILITY SPD

Audio recording – 8 minutes 36 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Ruth Brown, Executive Member for Planning and Transport to present the report entitled 'Draft Sustainability SPD' and advised of the following:

- This report was an overview of what details might be included in the Supplementary Planning Document.
- The Cabinet Panel on Environment had reviewed the outline proposals and their comments were included at 5.1 in the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Steve Jarvis, the Principle Strategic Planning Officer confirmed that the materials referred to in point 8.1 of the report was regarding building materials and that the final proposals would be brought back to the Cabinet Panel for further comments.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed, and Councillor Steve Jarvis seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the proposed structure and breadth of the draft Sustainability SPD was approved.

(2) That the issues and points raised by the Cabinet Panel on the Environment were noted.

(3) That, for the purposes of developing the draft SPD, Cabinet endorsed the principles of:

- A tiered approach to assessing the sustainability of new buildings in terms of both built fabric and operational efficiency; and
- Investigation of the application of parking standards, both residential and non-residential, with a view to reducing or offsetting them where appropriate.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Sustainability SPD to be progressed so that it may be publicly consulted upon with a view to being adopted.

176 STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - DRAFT FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Audio recording – 12 minutes 54 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Ruth Brown, Executive Member for Planning and Transport to present the report entitled 'Statement of Community Involvement' and advised of the following:

- This was an update to the existing Statement of Community Involvement, following the material changes in situation following the adoption of the Local Plan.
- There had been a change of emphasis, the Local Plan was now at the back of the document and the master planning section had been given higher priority.
- This draft would be presented for public consultation.

Councillor Ruth Brown proposed, and Councillor Ian Albert seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Council's current Statement of Community Involvement should be revised and replaced having regard to the factors outlined in this report.

(2) That subject to recommendation 2.1, the revised draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as attached as Appendix A to this report, be noted and approved for a six week public consultation.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: Officers consider that the SCI should be updated to reflect the change in emphasis from preparing the local plan to implementation, particularly through masterplanning.

177 THIRD QUARTER 2022/23 INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY)

Audio recording – 14 minutes 21 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, to present 'Third Quarter Strategy (Capita and Treasury) Review 2022-2023' and advised of the following:

- The Executive Summary and Table 2 in the report provided updates on the timing and delivery of capital projects, including those that have been delayed to 2023-24.
- The North Herts Museum Platform Lift project has been resolved and the previously allocated budget could be released.
- Treasury management had benefited from the increase of interest rates, and changes to these were being monitored, but investments were still being made in line with strategies and prudential indicators.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £8.370M in 2022/23 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2022/23 onwards, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend in 2023/24 by £1.554M.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

(4) Considered the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of December 2022.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

(2) To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

178 THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2022/23

Audio recording – 18 minutes 12 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, to present 'Third Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2022-2023' and advised of the following:

- Table 2 in the report detailed the changes in forecast, with the biggest area of movement being staffing underspends and recycled material costs.
- The change in recycled material cost had reversed the changes seen earlier in the year and reflected the volatility of the market.
- The Council had experienced difficulties in recruiting to some posts with a proposal to have funding carried over for use over the next 2 years, with an aim to address some of the resourcing issues.
- Table 6 highlights the overall forecast impact on the General Fund balance, and highlights the forecast increase compared to the budget but it was noted that expenditure still exceeds funding by £850K, therefore the increase would be met by transfer from other reserves.
- Recommendation 2.3 sought to increase spending by £549K which was expected to soften some of the increased balance.
- Resourcing issues had been raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 March 2023.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the report.

(2) Approved the changes to the 2022/23 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.3, a £1.060million decrease in net expenditure.

(3) Approved the changes to the 2023/24 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.3, a total £532k increase in net expenditure.

(4) Approved the use of £140k of salary budget carry-forward for additional Service Director capacity for an 18- month period, and that the allocation of the remainder (if needed) will be delegated to the Managing Director (as Head of Paid Service), in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance and IT.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

179 Q3 UPDATE ON COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

Audio recording – 22 minutes 4 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and It, to present 'Third Quarter Update on Council Delivery Plan Strategy' and stated the following:

- This was a key document used by Cabinet, Finance Audit and Risk, and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees as well as Executive Members for monitoring.
- This was the first year of this plan being presented and been broadly successful.
- The update provided details on several completed projects as well as some where milestones have been updated.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the:

(1) Progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including changes to milestone dates and risks.

(2) Completion of the Business Recovery Grants, EV Charging for Council Vehicles and the Help Residents make payments at convenient Location milestones for this year.

(3) Reduction in the Local Plan risk score from a 9, to a risk score of 6 following the end of the Judicial review period.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities.

180 2023-24 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MEASURES - COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN

Audio recording – 27 minutes 18 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Ian Albert, Executive Member for Finance and IT, to present '2023-2024 Performance Management Measures -Council Delivery Plan' and advised of the following:

- This sets out the Council Delivery Plan for 2023-2024 and identifies the key Council projects including their risks and performance indicators.
- Milestones for new project's will be added to, 'Quarter One Monitoring Report 2023-24'.
- Appendix A of the Delivery Plan highlights the 19 projects carried forward from 2022-23, with their current risk level and the 10 new projects.

- At the end of Appendix A are the stand alone performance indicator and risks, not linked to a specific project.
- Appendix B 'Summary of Projects', highlights the 11 projects that have either been completed, merged or established as Business as Usual from the Council Delivery plan 2022-23.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed, and Councillor Keith Hoskins seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: Cabinet considered and formally approved the Council Delivery Plan to be monitored throughout 2023/2024 by Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

REASONS FOR DECISION: An approved Council Delivery Plan provides the Cabinet with assurance that progress against achievement of the Council Plan objectives, will be monitored throughout 2023/24.

181 RIPA POLICY UPDATE

Audio recording – 30 minutes 31 seconds

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg presented the report entitled 'Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act ('RIPA') Annual' review, including that the report highlighted potential changes required to the Policy, due to updated legislation, detailed in section 8.3 of the report.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg, as Chair proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: The Cabinet approved the RIPA Policy as amended (Appendix A).

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with best practice guidance.

182 LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT UPDATE

Audio recording – 31 minutes 39 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Steve Jarvis, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure to present the report entitled 'Leisure Management Contract Procurement' and advised of the following:

- The current Leisure Management Contacts expires at the end of March 2024.
- There was also ongoing work developing a wider Leisure Strategy to form part of this retendering process.
- The Procurement has been budgeted for, in 2022-23 and 2023-24.
- It was proposed to proceed with a competitive procedure with negotiation procurement, which would allow the Council to negotiate with bidders and enter into discussions as to how best meet the Council strategies and needs of the district.
- A project board had been established to oversee the procurement process.
- It was proposed that this would be a single Leisure Management Contract for the 3 areas of Letchworth, Hitchin and Royston with a 10 year duration, which was standard practice in this industry.
- To make the contract more desirable we will be sharing the risk of maintenance and utilities costs.

Councillor Steve Jarvis proposed, and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved:

(1) A Competitive Procedure with Negotiation (CPN) procedure for the procurement of the Leisure Management contract.

(2) The delegation of powers to the Director of Place in consultation with project board, in relation to decisions associated with the development of the procurement strategy.

(3) The letting of a 10-year contract with an option to extend by up to 5 years.

(4) The combining of the existing three contracts into a single contract, using the nationally recognised Sport England contract format, in order to secure economies of scale and to attract the most interest from the operator market.

(5) That we would continue with the principle of the existing contractual shared risk approach to utilities and maintenance.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: The leisure management contract, expire on 31 March 2024. These recommendations ensure the procurement will be managed effectively to ensure the successful ongoing provision of leisure services in North Herts. Procurement offers an opportunity to review the existing specification and provide a clear policy position on it approach to the future delivery of sport, leisure, physical activity and wellbeing services across the district.

The meeting closed at 8.06 pm

Chair

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CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT & ACTION PLAN

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR LEGAL & COMMUNITY
EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
COUNCIL PRIORITY: BE A MORE WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COUNCIL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020 the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) undertook a review, the review report and Action Plan were agreed through Cabinet on 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020, respectively.

A follow up review was undertaken by (different) LGA CPC Peers during 2022 and a further LGA Peer Committee Support report was issued in January 2023 (Appendix A). This concentrated on the Overview & Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees and a number of further recommendations have been made. These have been separated out into the Action Plan (Appendix B) with response and proposed actions for the Committees consideration and recommendations to Cabinet.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the content of the CPC report be noted.

2.2. That the draft Action Plan at Appendix A be considered and approved (as per Appendix A or as amended, with relevant Overview & Scrutiny recommendation timescales).

2.3. That, *in the absence of timescales*, these be set by the Leader, Deputy Leader and Managing Director (in consultation with relevant Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The ‘do nothing’ option of not creating an Action Plan to follow up on the report has been discounted, as the Council committed to undertake the further CPC and should therefore seek to gain benefit from that process.

4.2. There is no prescribed format for the Action Plan, so it has been developed in a simple format, with reference to the recommendations.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Staff and Members identified by the Peers were interviewed and a report issued in January 2023. Copies were circulated to the Leader, Deputy Leader for initial consideration and this and the proposed response to the recommendations discussed in consultation with the Political Liaison Board (latterly on 16 May 2023).

5.2. This was also circulated following that to the then former Chair of Overview & Scrutiny and subsequently to the Chair and Vice Chair on 2 June 2023 (and to the Chair and Vice Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk). The Chair and Vice Chair of Overview & Scrutiny requested that this report and Action Plan came to the Committees in advance of Cabinet for consideration / recommendation.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a Key Executive decision.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The background to the first CPC report can be found in the Cabinet report of 24 March 2020 [CLICK HERE for then Chief Executive's report and CLICK HERE for the CPC report]. This was considered and the proposed actions by Overview and Scrutiny on 16 June 2020 and an Action Plan incorporating recommendations was approved by Cabinet 23 June 2020 [CLICK HERE for relevant Cabinet and report meeting page].

7.2. The LGA CPC was invited back to further review the effectiveness of the Overview & Scrutiny, and Finance, Audit and Risk Committee in December 2021. There were delays due to change of Peers, and covid and the review was undertaken during 2022. The final report was issued in January 2023 as per Appendix A.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The Action Plan at Appendix B seeks to embrace the recommendations from the Peer Challenge and look for ways to implement improvements in the way we work. There are 31 recommendations. *Those specifically relating to Overview & Scrutiny Committee are detailed at 1-21, albeit the Committee will note that recommendations 24, 25 & 26 suggests splitting and adding financial scrutiny to Overview & Scrutiny with consequential recommendations.* For the reasons outlined next to these recommendations, the Action Plan response does not embrace those suggestions *at this time*, although it will be a matter for consideration post-election in 2024 as part of the overall constitutional review.

8.2. Members will note that much of the timescale column is currently blank. Recommendations 1, 6, 7,11,12,13,16, 17 and 20 being a matter for this Committee/ Chair etc (as to be approved by Cabinet or under delegation as suggested).

8.3. The Committee should note that in respect to *recommendation 4*, that following recent Legal & Community restructures a part time Scrutiny Officer post has been created (for 17 hours), which is currently being recruited to – closing date 19 June. It is hoped that this will be successful, given the Action Plan also refers to the role of a Scrutiny Officer.

8.4. The Committee should also note that in respect to recommendations 2, 3, 9, 10, 14 (and duplicate 15), that Scrutiny training was also offered post-election in 2023 to all Councillors as part of the *compulsory training* for all the membership. This was provided by an external trainer from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, 9 Members were noted as attending. This was recorded and is available via Growzone, and 2 further Members are understood to have since undertaken this training. Any Member who was unable to attend / has not undertaken this via Growzone, should log in and undertake this training (*deadline date to be suggested by the Committee to Cabinet*).

8.5. Chairing skills training has also been offered as part of the induction programme (albeit general skills)..

8.6. In the absence of any suggested timelines to Cabinet (and none being finalised by Cabinet), it is proposed that the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Managing Director agree these dates as soon as possible after the Cabinet in June, in consultation with relevant Chairs and Vice Chairs of the two Committees, as per the suggested delegation.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Overview & Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference include at 6.2.7 "c) To make reports or recommendations to the authority or the Executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive;"

9.2 Cabinet's terms of reference include at paragraph 5.7.13 "To consider the reports of external review bodies on key aspects of overall service delivery".

9.2. The CPC is a voluntary process and therefore there is no legal obligation to either host a CPC or act upon the recommendations. However, it is best practice to undertake a CPC and having done so, to act upon the issues identified.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The recommendation relating to a Scrutiny Officer does have a financial implication. However, this has currently been covered as part of the overall reorganisations undertaken in Legal & Community by the Service Director during 2022-23. As a final decision, a part time role has been created for 17 hours per week (as the budget allowed, without seeking additional resource during the budgetary process). This approach had the support of the relevant Executive Member (then Leader covering Community Engagement), and Deputy Leader. The Leader of the opposition was also appraised of the reorganisation processes and suggested role during monthly briefings. This will need to be reviewed if the Service Director and Committee, Member & Scrutiny Manager are unable to recruit to this role during June.

10.2. The Peer Review, alongside many other services and support, is included within the Council's annual subscription to the Local Government Association.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11 The CPC process offers a way to suggest and drive improvements and efficiency. Failure to consider and act on external recommendations would therefore be a waste of such a resource and a consequential risk to the Council that its arrangements were not operating as effectively as they could.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are no known equalities implications that apply to this report. Individual actions on the plan may require equalities impact assessments in due course as solutions are developed.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The suggested Action Plan does involve additional resource – covered by a new Scrutiny Officer role. Such a role would still require support for meeting arrangements, and this will be covered by the existing Committee team.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – LGA Peer Committee Support.

16.2 Appendix B- Draft Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Jeanette Thompson, Service Director: Legal and Community
Jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk ; ext 4370

17.2 Anthony Roche, Managing Director:
anthony.roche@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4588

17.3 Ian Couper, Service Director Resources
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4243

17.3 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Communities Manager
reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4212

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None other than those already identified.

LGA Peer Committee Support

North Herts Council

January 2023

Overview & Scrutiny
Finance, Audit and Risk



Background

Following a remote meeting on 13 December 2021 between Anthony Roche and James Mehmed, North Herts Council commissioned the LGA to review the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) with the objective of improving both committees' overall impact and effectiveness to ensure they provide good governance and impactful decision making.

Three member peers, representing the political groups of the joint administration and inclusive of the opposition were used to undertake the review together as one team. Member peers were selected by the council for their experience and knowledge with both committees.

The review was requested to commence after the budget planning cycle had concluded circa February - March 2022. Work commenced in April following a scoping meeting to agree the approach to the review and the method of engagement.

Methodology

The methodology for conducting the review was agreed jointly between the council and member peers.

- Agree general approach in an initial scoping meeting (22 April).
- Conduct a desktop review of agreed documents, information and observing video recordings of previous committee meetings (April / May).
- Discuss the initial outcomes of the desktop review with the council as initial feedback and to clarify outstanding questions to inform the review (23 May).
- Member peers to engage in an agreed phase of virtual engagement comprising of one to ones, small groups and focus groups (9 meetings). (June – October).
- For both committees, peers to document observations, insight and make improvement recommendations and send to council for consideration. (Circa Oct / Nov 2022)
- Throughout this review we have been mindful of the four principles of effective overview and scrutiny. Provide constructive 'critical friend challenge', amplify the voices and concerns of the public, be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role and drive improvement in public services.

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- The report details feedback and summary points captured during the stakeholder engagement sessions by peers. These points have not been cross-checked for accuracy or factual correctness.

Peer Team

- Cllr Sioned Mair-Richards, Sheffield City Council
- Cllr Michael Headley, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Lesley Clarke OBE, Buckinghamshire Council

LGA

- James Mehmed, Senior Regional Advisor

Key Reflections & Observations

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Strengths:

- Members and officers both share a desire and willingness to see the overview and scrutiny function (O&S) operate more effectively and stated they are prepared to both consider and where agreed implement recommendations from this peer support.
- Strong community engagement through area committees, town talks and citizen panels.
- Outside partnership working was seen to be good.
- O&S committee meetings well attended by officers and portfolio holder when requested to participate.
- Chairing of O&S is conducted in a way that is politically neutral.

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Areas for Development:

Engagement

- There are many ways in which the council engages with its communities, e.g. citizens panels. It is unclear how the panels work in conjunction with the O&S process.

- Area committees - there appears to be no information shared with O&S. It was unclear to peers if the information collected from these meetings was used by O&S to assist with their deliberations on the same topics.

- Does the good partnership working assist the O&S committee with their deliberations, are the outcomes / information shared with O&S? When peers asked members if there was any interaction with O&S – the response concluded there is none.

- The community groups and panels are in place to gauge the local community's / interested group/s view/s on various issues or "schematic areas" to assist with "functionality" within the council area/s.

- There appeared to be no understanding by the scrutiny committee concerning benefits groups and panels brought to the council. Thoughts were that it was to communicate with the public and these communications were primarily in place to measure responses to ongoing council policies or issues.

- Cabinet panels to be better linked into the scrutiny process, such as scrutiny having a role in considering the outcomes.

- There was agreement during a peer meeting confirming the cabinet panels did overlap with the function of O&S.

- Consideration is needed to explore whether all the various outside groups and panels are necessary to avoid duplication.

- Consideration should be given to how you ensure all parts of the community can engage with council meetings.

- Is the TOM for scrutiny being effectively used by Overview & Scrutiny and if so, what benefits does it bring? Are there other benefits to the council by using this?

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Do members and officers really understand O&S and what it can achieve and deliver for the council if used properly?

It is important that the members who attend the O&S committee are well informed on the papers they have in front of them and there is appropriate robust questioning, if required, it appears that this is often left to the chair.

- A suggestion to improve this would be to have a series of questions drawn up between the chair and vice chair along with the lead scrutiny officer in advance of the meeting.

- An alternative approach could involve the chair of the O&S committee to have a pre-meeting, with all members of O&S, to agree who is to ask the questions. This gives the opportunity for the O&S member, themselves, to probe further into matters that then may arise from the various answers received.

- During observed scrutiny committees, questioning techniques were not well developed and can be superficial or aggressive.

- Roles are not clear enough. That is roles for scrutiny members / cabinet members / officers. Sometimes it seems more like a general discussion, rather than accountability for cabinet members. Officers should advise and not therefore be held to account for decisions owned by cabinet members.

- It was not clear who actually determines the agenda items for O&S.

- The cabinet felt that O&S were not considering the cabinet's forward plan and co-ordinating and planning agenda items to review subsequent decisions.

- It would appear that O&S are often given items on their agenda that have yet to be debated or determined by cabinet itself.

- Scrutiny is to both review pre-cabinet decisions and recommend any changes. They need to be cautious not for them to be an integral part of the decision making but to be able to make suggested changes prior to a cabinet decision.

- O&S function is also to scrutinise the decisions made by the cabinet. The O&S request those decisions to come to O&S for scrutiny are reasonable and yet there are examples where they are told that they cannot do this.

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- Some members spoken to by peers felt they were perceived by officers as a nuisance; something officers have to put up with. Although this wasn't a universal view.

- Some O&S committee members report that they find it difficult to obtain background information, this point was also a concern and highlighted by a previous corporate peer challenge and appears to continue to be an unresolved issue which could be resolved by a dedicated scrutiny officer.

- A request was made that the O&S meetings should be better spaced across the municipal year, perhaps every 6 weeks rather than the current meeting pattern that is in place.

- Cabinet members in attendance with peers agreed that not all council members fully understand the role of scrutiny and what benefits it can bring to the council as a whole.

- Training for O&S members has recently been delivered. Further consideration should be given to the approach taken supporting members with development and training to ensure a targeted approach enables greater knowledge transfer and ongoing development. It was felt that O&S was not as effective or efficient as it could be and the cabinet agreed that a dedicated officer for scrutiny should be sought.

- Finance scrutiny has been left to FAR and is therefore not as effectively scrutinised as other areas.

Recommendations:

- Define what you want your scrutiny panels to achieve.

- Put into place scrutiny training for the whole council (members and officers) and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Ensure all members understand the benefits and role of scrutiny.

- Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g. use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.

- Urgently fund and recruit a dedicated scrutiny officer.

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- Members to actively review the forward plan and invitation of cabinet members to attend O&S This could be overcome with a dedicated scrutiny officer in place.

- Proper and effective reporting onwards to council and cabinet by O&S is required.

- Establish clear meeting protocols and associated processes for questioning cabinet members.

- Officers to always facilitate the bringing forward of future agenda items requested by O&S in a timely manner.

- Training in scrutiny questioning skills (KLOE).

- Specific O&S training for the opposition too to encourage effective opposition role. There is specific scrutiny training for groups in opposition to assist with scrutiny work and assists them in being more effective throughout the council.

- Scrutiny needs to actively seek to implement the use of task & finish groups.

- It was observed by some members that the preparation for the special scrutiny meeting on the 'call to account' was beneficial and lessons learnt on how this preparation helped scrutiny should be considered in taking forward scrutiny in the future.

Cabinet

- Cabinet members should consistently and without exception be expected to attend O&S committee meetings where decisions from their area of responsibilities are being scrutinised.

- It should not be for the lead officer to attend in their place, as this shows an indifference to what O&S delivers.

- The scrutiny chair or their representative should attend all cabinet meetings to present scrutiny findings, particularly to enable the thinking and debate around the recommendations to be clearly communicated with the cabinet to maximise the impact scrutiny can have on decisions.

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- Whilst it is understood that any recommendations from O&S do not have to be agreed by the cabinet, reasons for rejections should be given.

- Sometimes it is necessary to take urgent decisions and are made by the leader / cabinet members in consultation with the managing director / senior officers. Members of the committee should be reminded that existing procedures permits challenge through the 'call in' process.

- The leader arranges cabinet panels for members to review items coming to cabinet for decision and make recommendations. These panels will include cabinet members and members from across the council, including scrutiny and finance, audit and risk – there is concern that these panels duplicate work that is already within the committee structure for both O&S and FAR.

- There appears to be some confusion with members over who scrutinises finance and the budget process. There is a wide held view that it is FAR, but FAR is not constitutionally an O&S committee.

- Cabinet agreed to a suggestion that it would be more effective to split finance scrutiny from the finance, audit and risk committee, therefore leaving the audit and risk committee with a clearer role accountable to full council.

- There were mixed views on the purpose and role of the political liaison board.

- There was uncertainty why Best Value Reviews been abandoned, yet requests are made for these to happen, particularly high-profile contracts – e.g. Leisure Services, Waste. The cabinet were perplexed that this had not been put into place by O&S as they see it as a useful tool to "deep dive" on issues. However, O&S members felt they did not have the opportunity to use best value reviews.

Lead Officer and Agenda Setting

- The role of scrutiny officer is shared throughout committee services which raises the question concerning where the knowledge of the O&S committee's working comes from. It appears there is no consistency within the committee services element of the administration of the committee.

- A dedicated officer could lead to positive agenda setting / work planning with the chair and vice chair of O&S and ensure that there was cabinet member involvement.

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- The process of considering an O&S agenda item is not well defined and can become a general debate, rather than an accountability mechanism. A clear process could be written to ensure there is a sequence of involvement, respecting roles. e.g. 1) Portfolio holder (PH) presents. 2) PH is questioned. 3) Officer is questioned. 4) Decision / report is debated by scrutiny members. 5) Recommendation is made by scrutiny members.

- Need more proactive agenda setting, for example through an annual workshop to set an initial proactive workplan for the year.

- Scrutiny appears to often come too late in the process to have an effective impact on pre-scrutiny decisions (same report as cabinet) and too early in the process (feeds into cabinet) to be effective at post decision scrutiny holding cabinet to account.

- It has been stated that the agendas for O&S are sent to O&S members without any recourse to the chair – if this is the case then there is likely to be an issue with democratic services understanding the chair's role, as the chair is the person who ensures members views determine items for debate.

- The officers within democratic services are new to the authority, which may be leading to an imbalance of agenda setting, which should be led by members.

- It is understood that some officers perceive O&S as a means to "catch officers out".

- There was a concern raised that there was at least one occasion where an officer felt they had been "attacked" at O&S – it is important that meetings are organised and chaired in a way that promotes appropriate behaviour, robust but not discourteous.

Training

- The council was asked to provide details regarding the numbers of members who have attended the original O&S training and detail concerning any follow up of those that did not attend. To date no detail or information has been made available to peers.

- Training for new members is both vital and essential so that the new members do make a positive stance and take part in the scrutiny process.

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Recommendations:

- Establish proactive annual programme of work and agenda setting.
- Provide O&S training in chairing skills.
- Training in scrutiny questioning skills (KLOE).
- Ensure the scrutiny committee actively follow up on all recommendations.
- Consideration should be given by the cabinet and portfolio holders on how they can carry out their role in a way that supports scrutiny being able to act as effectively as possible.
- Ensure minutes reflect the decisions of the meeting – e.g. requests for agenda items to be recorded in the minutes and added to the forward plan.
- Cabinet members should consistently and without exception be expected to attend O&S committee meetings where decisions from their area of responsibilities are being scrutinised.
- The scrutiny chair or their representative should attend all cabinet meetings to present scrutiny findings, particularly to enable the thinking and debate around the recommendations to be clearly communicated with the cabinet to maximise the impact scrutiny can have on decisions.
- Where cabinet do not accept an O&S recommendation, reasons should be given.

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Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR)

Strengths:

- Financial risks are considered, but only the financial aspects of any other risk.
- FAR is involved in the budget setting process.
- Provides focus for finance trained councillors to specialise.

Areas for Development:

Membership of committees

- Training is given to the FAR membership. Members should have some interest in the committee itself and have a rudimentary understanding of local government finance.

  Members should read and understand the papers sent to them in good time ahead of the scrutiny meeting to actively inform their question and scrutiny preparation.
- The finance and IT cabinet member attends the meeting as an observer and is only called upon to respond to any questions that are not fully answered by the lead finance officer.
- All other officers attend meetings virtually, which can cause problems with IT failures. Consideration should be given to attending in person.
- FAR members should actively engage in all skills audits to support the identification of any ongoing training and development requirements, to support members in being effective in their committee role.

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Recommendations:

- Ensure a skills audit for all members is conducted at the beginning of the council term as part of the induction process to support groups in making the best appointments to committees.

Meeting Structure

- Consideration should be given for the audit and risk element of this committee to be a committee in its own right.

Risk

At an appropriate point, review the new process for monitoring corporate risks.

- All FAR committee members have access to the council's risk register. It would be timely to remind all members how to access the risk register, whilst reminding them officers are happy to assist as appropriate.

- Clarity is required over who chooses the risks for review that go to FAR and what criteria is used to ensure this process is transparent, clearly understood and objective. The committee should be reminded of the existing processes.

- If the risk management champion is a cabinet member how does FAR committee ensure they are being kept properly informed and updated on the risks they review?

- Risk Implications in the Annual Governance Statement – states: "The risk and opportunities management strategy require the finance audit and risk committee to consider regular report on the council's corporate risk. Failure to provide the committee with regular updates would conflict with the agreed strategy and would mean that the committee could not provide assurance to cabinet that the council's identified corporate risks are being managed.

- In para 7.2 it states that FAR recommended the changes and they were referred on to cabinet and approved – yet they were not mentioned in this agenda item, are the recommendations referred to in the minutes of the meeting of September 2021. Formal reference back should be made.

- All members should be reminded they can access the risk register by contacting democratic services.

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Additional Observations

- It was suggested that those prospective FAR committee members should be given a realistic understanding of the workload and role on the committee.

- Finance scrutiny is not being undertaken in a scrutiny committee; this means that some of the holding to account functions are not being carried out in regard to the finance portfolio holder.

- FAR is experiencing a high turnover of members and is not therefore seeing the benefit of being a “specialist” committee.

Recommendations:

- Put into place training for the whole council and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Including an introduction to local government finance.

- Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g. use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.

- Split finance scrutiny from audit and risk. The scrutiny of finance should sit with a scrutiny committee rather than in the audit and risk committee.

- After the audit and risk function had been split from the finance (scrutiny) role, the new audit committee should focus on understanding their audit role and undertake a self-assessment of the role of an effective audit committee.

- Enhance the status of a new audit & risk committee.

- Consider an easier way for members to view the risk register.

- Support members with better understanding of the council’s risks.

- Minutes to reflect the decisions of the meeting – i.e. requests for agenda items to be in the minutes and added to the forward plan.

- Conduct a skills audit of all members at induction training to support groups in making appropriate appointments to committees.

- Ensure that every member of the community can easily access information about council meetings.

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Next Steps

- Following the review of this document, at your request, peers can be assembled to discuss any aspect of their work to further explain or provide feedback relating to one or both committees as requested.
- The LGA can also advise on further support and training relating to the recommendations made by peers.

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Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
	Overview and Scrutiny Committee				
1	Define what you want your scrutiny panels to achieve.	To be discussed with the scrutiny committee, but approach based on the 4 principles of good scrutiny would make sense:- • provides critical friend challenge to policymakers and decision makers • enables the voice and concerns of the public • is carried out by independent-minded people who lead and own the scrutiny role • drives improvement in public services	Scrutiny Committee		
2	Put into place scrutiny training for the whole council (members and officers) and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Ensure all members understand the benefits and role of scrutiny.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed. Group leaders need to reinforce the importance of attending training with their groups	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		
3	Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g., use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		
4	Urgently fund and recruit a dedicated scrutiny officer.	Budget has been identified for a part time scrutiny officer, subject to successful recruitment	Democratic Services Manager/ Committee,		

Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
			Member & Scrutiny Manager		
5	Members to actively review the forward plan and invitation of cabinet members to attend O&S. This could be overcome with a dedicated scrutiny officer in place.	This is already on every agenda and is done at every meeting. It will be for Members to take forward with the Scrutiny Officer.	Scrutiny Committee Scrutiny officer		
6	Proper and effective reporting onwards to council and cabinet by O&S is required.	Chair and scrutiny officer will need to take this forward and consider the best way to report O+S discussion to Cabinet and Council. This can be done verbally. A report from a Task & Finish Group would be a written report.	Chair of Scrutiny Scrutiny officer		
7	Establish clear meeting protocols and associated processes for questioning cabinet members.	For scrutiny officer to work through with the Chair.	Chair of Scrutiny Scrutiny officer		
8	Officers to always facilitate the bringing forward of future agenda items requested by O&S in a timely manner.	This is accepted but felt to have been a one-off example. It would be for the scrutiny officer to ensure this happens.	Scrutiny officer		
9	Training in scrutiny questioning skills (KLOE).	Has been and will continue to be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		
10	Specific O&S training for the opposition too to encourage effective opposition role. There is specific scrutiny training for groups in opposition to assist with scrutiny work and assists them in being more effective throughout the council.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		
11	Scrutiny needs to actively seek to implement the use of task & finish groups.	This is for the Chair and Committee to consider, with the	Chair of Scrutiny Scrutiny Committee		

Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
		support of the Scrutiny Officer.	Scrutiny officer		
12	It was observed by some members that the preparation for the special scrutiny meeting on the 'call to account' was beneficial and lessons learnt on how this preparation helped scrutiny should be considered in taking forward scrutiny in the future.	For scrutiny officer to work through with the Chair.	Chair of Scrutiny Scrutiny officer		
13	Establish proactive annual programme of work and agenda setting.	This is for the Chair and Committee to consider, with the support of the Scrutiny Officer.	Chair of Scrutiny Scrutiny Committee Scrutiny officer		
14	Provide O&S training in chairing skills.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		
15	Training in scrutiny questioning skills (KLOE).	Duplicate. See entry 9 above			
16	Ensure the scrutiny committee actively follow up on all recommendations.	This is already on every agenda. For scrutiny officer to work with the Chair and committee to ensure it is actively look at it.	Chair of Scrutiny Scrutiny Committee Scrutiny officer		
17	Consideration should be given by the cabinet and portfolio holders on how they can carry out their role in a way that supports scrutiny being able to act as effectively as possible.	This links to the vision for scrutiny in recommendation one. It should be a two-way critical friend relationship. To be included as part of training and potentially part of work planning. Cabinet to consider how to better engage with scrutiny.	Cabinet Scrutiny Committee Chair of Scrutiny		
18	Ensure minutes reflect the decisions of the meeting – e.g., requests for agenda items	Committee services and the scrutiny officer will make sure	Committee Services		

Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
	to be recorded in the minutes and added to the forward plan.	everything is accurately captured.	Scrutiny officer		
19	Cabinet members should consistently and without exception be expected to attend O&S committee meetings where decisions from their area of responsibilities are being scrutinised.	Agreed. This is the current approach unless there is an emergency. Cabinet to consider as part of how to better engage with scrutiny.	Cabinet		
20	The scrutiny chair or their representative should attend all cabinet meetings to present scrutiny findings, particularly to enable the thinking and debate around the recommendations to be clearly communicated with the cabinet to maximise the impact scrutiny can have on decisions.	Agreed.	Chair of Scrutiny		
21	Where cabinet do not accept an O&S recommendation, reasons should be given.	Agreed. Cabinet to consider as part of how to better engage with scrutiny.	Cabinet		
	Finance Audit and Risk Committee	**Response**			
22	Put into place training for the whole council and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Including an introduction to local government finance.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		
23	Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g. use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed. Message to go out that it is ok to ask IC for help with development applicable to all cttees, not just FAR.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development		

Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
24	Split finance scrutiny from audit and risk. The scrutiny of finance should sit with a scrutiny committee rather than in the audit and risk committee.	The reasons behind the recommendation are understood, but considered premature. Given the various recommendations that need to be implemented in respect of Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is perhaps not the best time to be giving the committee additional work. Equally the introduction of an independent member and the various recommendations that need to be implemented in respect of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, should improve, and enhance that Committee. This recommendation will therefore be revisited in 18 months as part of a wider review of structures post 2024 election.	Leader Deputy Leader Managing Director SD Legal and Community SD Resources		
25	After the audit and risk function had been split from the finance (scrutiny) role, the new audit committee should focus on understanding their audit role and undertake a self-assessment of the role of an effective audit committee.	To be considered as part of the wider review of structures post 2024 election.	As above		
26	Enhance the status of a new audit & risk committee.	Though there will not be an additional Audit and Risk Committee at this time, we do	Group Leaders SD Resources		

Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
		need to enhance the status of the current committee. Group Leaders asked to explain importance of the role to the appointments they make to FAR. SD Resources to draft a form of words for the Chair to read out at the first meeting of FAR in the new civic year to explain its purpose and importance. Description of the committee on the website to be reviewed as currently under sells the committee.			
27	Consider an easier way for members to view the risk register.	The risk register is accessible with a user name and password, however will consider different access options and re-promote to make clear it is available to all Members, not just those on the committee.	SD Resources		
28	Support members with better understanding of the council's risks.	Agreed. Training on risk will take place after the May 2023 election and in advance of the first committee meetings, particularly where the issues are cross cutting. Thereafter will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development SD Resources		
29	Minutes to reflect the decisions of the meeting – i.e., requests for agenda items	Committee services will make sure everything is accurately captured.	Committee Services		

Action Plan in response to recommendations from Peer Support to O&S and FAR Committees 2023

	Recommendation	Response	Ownership	Target Date (where applicable)	Status
	to be in the minutes and added to the forward plan.				
30	Conduct a skills audit of all members at induction training to support groups in making appropriate appointments to committees.	Agreed. For Group leaders to take forward with their groups. Will also be used to inform the member training programme being developed.	Group leaders		
31	Ensure that every member of the community can easily access information about council meetings.	Agreed, albeit there are currently a number of ways to access information and it is not solely digitally/online. Reminder to be placed in Outlook about how to access information. Committee services to consider the issue more broadly to ensure we are not accidentally disenfranchising parts of the community.	Committee Services		

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CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: PEER SUPPORT ACTION PLAN (FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE)

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR: RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council commissioned the Local Government Association to provide peer support in relation to the impact and effectiveness of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee. The peer support process took place during 2022 and was a combination of a desktop review, watching meeting videos and talking to relevant Members and Officers. A report was provided to the Council in January 2023 with their findings and recommendations. This report considers the recommendations in relation to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet consider any comments from the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.
2.2. That Cabinet approve the draft Action Plan

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the peer support report, ensuring that the benefits of that process are realised.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The ‘do nothing’ option of not creating an action plan to follow up on the report has been discounted, as the Council committed to receive the peer support and should therefore seek to gain benefit from that process.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The LGA Peer Committee Support report is attached at Appendix A and details the approach taken, and who was involved in the process.

5.2. Following the receipt of the report, Officers and Executive Members have developed an action plan. The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee are asked to consider and comment on the action plan.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The background to this report is set out in the background section of the LGA Peer Committee Support report (Appendix A).

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The table below sets out the recommendations from the LGA report, and proposed actions. In the final column, the text it bold sets the target dates for the proposed actions. In some cases the actions have already been completed, or will have been completed by the time this report is considered by the Committee.

Recommendation	Comment/ Proposed Action	Ownership	Additional information and target completion date
Put into place training for the whole council and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Including an introduction to local government finance.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development	7th June 2023- member induction session covering Finance and Risk. All Councillors invited to attend. **7th June 2023 and review in determining 2024 training programme.**
Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g. use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.	Will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed (see above). Message to go out that it is ok to ask the Service Director: Resources (Chief Finance Officer) for help with development applicable to all committees, not just FAR.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development	The regular training sessions before FAR meetings will be continued. Where there is likely to be wider interest, they will be made available to all Councillors via zoom. First one on 21st June 2023. To be used to emphasise that additional support and advice is also available as required. **21st June onwards**

Recommendation	Comment/ Proposed Action	Ownership	Additional information and target completion date
Split finance scrutiny from audit and risk. The scrutiny of finance should sit with a scrutiny committee rather than in the audit and risk committee.	The reasons behind the recommendation are understood but considered to be premature. Given the various recommendations that need to be implemented in respect of Overview and Scrutiny Committee it is perhaps not the best time to be giving the committee additional work. Equally the introduction of an independent member and the various recommendations that need to be implemented in respect of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, should improve and enhance that Committee. This recommendation will therefore be revisited in 18 months as part of a wider review of structures post 2024 election.	Leader Deputy Leader Managing Director Service Director: Legal and Community Service Director: Resources	No actions currently as subject to review
After the audit and risk function had been split from the finance (scrutiny) role, the new audit committee should focus on understanding their audit role and undertake a self-assessment of the role of an effective audit committee.	To be considered as part of the wider review of structures post 2024 election.	As above	**N/a, at this time**

Recommendation	Comment/ Proposed Action	Ownership	Additional information and target completion date
Enhance the status of a new audit & risk committee.	Though there will not be an additional Audit and Risk Committee at this time, we do need to enhance the status of the current committee. Group Leaders asked to explain importance of the role to the appointments they make to FAR. SD Resources to draft a form of words for the Chair to read out at the first meeting of FAR in the new civic year to explain its purpose and importance. Description of the committee on the website to be reviewed as currently under-sells the committee.	Group Leaders SD Resources	Will already have happened, but FAR members to consider the role that they can play in promoting the committee. **21st June 2023** **Complete**, updated on this FAR page under Meetings. Agendas and Minutes.
Consider an easier way for members to view the risk register.	The risk register is accessible with a user name and password, however will consider different access options and re-promote to make clear it is available to all Members, not just those on the committee.	Service Director: Resources	Will be promoted as part of the Finance and Risk training on 7th June 2023, and then promoted in the Members Information Service bulletin. **30th June 2023**
Support members with better understanding of the council's risks.	Agreed. Training on risk will take place after the May 2023 election and in advance of the first committee meetings, particularly where the issues are cross cutting. Thereafter will be incorporated within the member training programme being developed.	Democratic Services Member Champions Learning + Development Service Director: Resources	7th June 2023- member induction session covering Finance and Risk. All Councillors invited to attend. **7th June 2023 and review in determining 2024 training programme.**

Recommendation	Comment/ Proposed Action	Ownership	Additional information and target completion date
Minutes to reflect the decisions of the meeting – i.e., requests for agenda items to be in the minutes and added to the forward plan.	Committee services will make sure everything is accurately captured.	Committee Services	Each FAR meeting will have a discussion of future agenda items, but mindful of the role of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. **21st June 2023 onwards**
Conduct a skills audit of all members at induction training to support groups in making appropriate appointments to committees.	Agreed. For Group leaders to take forward with their groups. Will also be used to inform the member training programme being developed.	Group leaders	To form part of the first FAR training session to inform future training **21st June onwards**
Ensure that every member of the community can easily access information about council meetings.	Agreed, albeit there are currently a number of ways to access information and it is not solely digitally/online. Reminder to be placed in Outlook about how to access information. Committee services to consider the issue more broadly to ensure we are not accidentally disenfranchising parts of the community.	Committee Services	TBC

8.2. Finance, Audit and Risk Committee are asked to consider and comment on the proposed actions, and then to refer this report (along with any comments) on to Cabinet.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Cabinet's terms of reference include at paragraph 5.6.13 "To consider the reports of external review bodies on key aspects of overall service delivery".

9.2. It is good practice for the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee to comment on an action plan that affects them. Under the constitution 10.1.5 (v) provides that "To review any issue referred to it by the Managing Director, Statutory Officer or Service Director, or any Council body and undertake such other functions that may be delegated to it from time to time by Council."

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Where additional training is provided then the cost of this will have to be considered, but the Council does have budget allocated for member training.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. The aim of the peer support process is to improve the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (and Overview and Scrutiny Committee). An effectively operating Audit Committee helps to manage the risks that the Council faces.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are no known equalities implications that apply to this report. Individual actions on the plan may require equalities impact assessments in due course as solutions are developed.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The tasks in the peer review follow-up action plan will be incorporated in to service plans for 2023/24, and some of the actions have already been completed.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – LGA Peer Committee Support Report

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Ian Couper, Service Director Resources
ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4243

17.2 Jeanette Thompson, Service Director: Legal and Community
Jeanette.thompson@north-herts.gov.uk ; ext 4370

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None

LGA Peer Committee Support

North Herts Council

January 2023

Overview & Scrutiny
Finance, Audit and Risk



Background

Following a remote meeting on 13 December 2021 between Anthony Roche and James Mehmed, North Herts Council commissioned the LGA to review the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR) with the objective of improving both committees' overall impact and effectiveness to ensure they provide good governance and impactful decision making.

Three member peers, representing the political groups of the joint administration and inclusive of the opposition were used to undertake the review together as one team. Member peers were selected by the council for their experience and knowledge with both committees.

The review was requested to commence after the budget planning cycle had concluded circa February - March 2022. Work commenced in April following a scoping meeting to agree the approach to the review and the method of engagement.

Methodology

The methodology for conducting the review was agreed jointly between the council and member peers.

- Agree general approach in an initial scoping meeting (22 April).
- Conduct a desktop review of agreed documents, information and observing video recordings of previous committee meetings (April / May).
- Discuss the initial outcomes of the desktop review with the council as initial feedback and to clarify outstanding questions to inform the review (23 May).
- Member peers to engage in an agreed phase of virtual engagement comprising of one to ones, small groups and focus groups (9 meetings). (June – October).
- For both committees, peers to document observations, insight and make improvement recommendations and send to council for consideration. (Circa Oct / Nov 2022)
- Throughout this review we have been mindful of the four principles of effective overview and scrutiny. Provide constructive 'critical friend challenge', amplify the voices and concerns of the public, be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role and drive improvement in public services.

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- The report details feedback and summary points captured during the stakeholder engagement sessions by peers. These points have not been cross-checked for accuracy or factual correctness.

Peer Team

- Cllr Sioned Mair-Richards, Sheffield City Council
- Cllr Michael Headley, Bedford Borough Council
- Cllr Lesley Clarke OBE, Buckinghamshire Council

LGA

- James Mehmed, Senior Regional Advisor

Key Reflections & Observations

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Strengths:

- Members and officers both share a desire and willingness to see the overview and scrutiny function (O&S) operate more effectively and stated they are prepared to both consider and where agreed implement recommendations from this peer support.
- Strong community engagement through area committees, town talks and citizen panels.
- Outside partnership working was seen to be good.
- O&S committee meetings well attended by officers and portfolio holder when requested to participate.
- Chairing of O&S is conducted in a way that is politically neutral.

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Areas for Development:

Engagement

- There are many ways in which the council engages with its communities, e.g. citizens panels. It is unclear how the panels work in conjunction with the O&S process.

- Area committees - there appears to be no information shared with O&S. It was unclear to peers if the information collected from these meetings was used by O&S to assist with their deliberations on the same topics.

- Does the good partnership working assist the O&S committee with their deliberations, are the outcomes / information shared with O&S? When peers asked members if there was any interaction with O&S – the response concluded there is none.

- The community groups and panels are in place to gauge the local community's / interested group/s view/s on various issues or "schematic areas" to assist with "functionality" within the council area/s.

- There appeared to be no understanding by the scrutiny committee concerning benefits groups and panels brought to the council. Thoughts were that it was to communicate with the public and these communications were primarily in place to measure responses to ongoing council policies or issues.

- Cabinet panels to be better linked into the scrutiny process, such as scrutiny having a role in considering the outcomes.

- There was agreement during a peer meeting confirming the cabinet panels did overlap with the function of O&S.

- Consideration is needed to explore whether all the various outside groups and panels are necessary to avoid duplication.

- Consideration should be given to how you ensure all parts of the community can engage with council meetings.

- Is the TOM for scrutiny being effectively used by Overview & Scrutiny and if so, what benefits does it bring? Are there other benefits to the council by using this?

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Do members and officers really understand O&S and what it can achieve and deliver for the council if used properly?

It is important that the members who attend the O&S committee are well informed on the papers they have in front of them and there is appropriate robust questioning, if required, it appears that this is often left to the chair.

- A suggestion to improve this would be to have a series of questions drawn up between the chair and vice chair along with the lead scrutiny officer in advance of the meeting.

- An alternative approach could involve the chair of the O&S committee to have a pre-meeting, with all members of O&S, to agree who is to ask the questions. This gives the opportunity for the O&S member, themselves, to probe further into matters that then may arise from the various answers received.

- During observed scrutiny committees, questioning techniques were not well developed and can be superficial or aggressive.

- Roles are not clear enough. That is roles for scrutiny members / cabinet members / officers. Sometimes it seems more like a general discussion, rather than accountability for cabinet members. Officers should advise and not therefore be held to account for decisions owned by cabinet members.

- It was not clear who actually determines the agenda items for O&S.

- The cabinet felt that O&S were not considering the cabinet's forward plan and co-ordinating and planning agenda items to review subsequent decisions.

- It would appear that O&S are often given items on their agenda that have yet to be debated or determined by cabinet itself.

- Scrutiny is to both review pre-cabinet decisions and recommend any changes. They need to be cautious not for them to be an integral part of the decision making but to be able to make suggested changes prior to a cabinet decision.

- O&S function is also to scrutinise the decisions made by the cabinet. The O&S request those decisions to come to O&S for scrutiny are reasonable and yet there are examples where they are told that they cannot do this.

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- Some members spoken to by peers felt they were perceived by officers as a nuisance; something officers have to put up with. Although this wasn't a universal view.

- Some O&S committee members report that they find it difficult to obtain background information, this point was also a concern and highlighted by a previous corporate peer challenge and appears to continue to be an unresolved issue which could be resolved by a dedicated scrutiny officer.

- A request was made that the O&S meetings should be better spaced across the municipal year, perhaps every 6 weeks rather than the current meeting pattern that is in place.

- Cabinet members in attendance with peers agreed that not all council members fully understand the role of scrutiny and what benefits it can bring to the council as a whole.

- Training for O&S members has recently been delivered. Further consideration should be given to the approach taken supporting members with development and training to ensure a targeted approach enables greater knowledge transfer and ongoing development. It was felt that O&S was not as effective or efficient as it could be and the cabinet agreed that a dedicated officer for scrutiny should be sought.

- Finance scrutiny has been left to FAR and is therefore not as effectively scrutinised as other areas.

Recommendations:

- Define what you want your scrutiny panels to achieve.

- Put into place scrutiny training for the whole council (members and officers) and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Ensure all members understand the benefits and role of scrutiny.

- Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g. use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.

- Urgently fund and recruit a dedicated scrutiny officer.

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- Members to actively review the forward plan and invitation of cabinet members to attend O&S This could be overcome with a dedicated scrutiny officer in place.

- Proper and effective reporting onwards to council and cabinet by O&S is required.

- Establish clear meeting protocols and associated processes for questioning cabinet members.

- Officers to always facilitate the bringing forward of future agenda items requested by O&S in a timely manner.

- Training in scrutiny questioning skills (KLOE).

- Specific O&S training for the opposition too to encourage effective opposition role. There is specific scrutiny training for groups in opposition to assist with scrutiny work and assists them in being more effective throughout the council.

- Scrutiny needs to actively seek to implement the use of task & finish groups.

- It was observed by some members that the preparation for the special scrutiny meeting on the 'call to account' was beneficial and lessons learnt on how this preparation helped scrutiny should be considered in taking forward scrutiny in the future.

Cabinet

- Cabinet members should consistently and without exception be expected to attend O&S committee meetings where decisions from their area of responsibilities are being scrutinised.

- It should not be for the lead officer to attend in their place, as this shows an indifference to what O&S delivers.

- The scrutiny chair or their representative should attend all cabinet meetings to present scrutiny findings, particularly to enable the thinking and debate around the recommendations to be clearly communicated with the cabinet to maximise the impact scrutiny can have on decisions.

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- Whilst it is understood that any recommendations from O&S do not have to be agreed by the cabinet, reasons for rejections should be given.

- Sometimes it is necessary to take urgent decisions and are made by the leader / cabinet members in consultation with the managing director / senior officers. Members of the committee should be reminded that existing procedures permits challenge through the 'call in' process.

- The leader arranges cabinet panels for members to review items coming to cabinet for decision and make recommendations. These panels will include cabinet members and members from across the council, including scrutiny and finance, audit and risk – there is concern that these panels duplicate work that is already within the committee structure for both O&S and FAR.

- There appears to be some confusion with members over who scrutinises finance and the budget process. There is a wide held view that it is FAR, but FAR is not constitutionally an O&S committee.

- Cabinet agreed to a suggestion that it would be more effective to split finance scrutiny from the finance, audit and risk committee, therefore leaving the audit and risk committee with a clearer role accountable to full council.

- There were mixed views on the purpose and role of the political liaison board.

- There was uncertainty why Best Value Reviews been abandoned, yet requests are made for these to happen, particularly high-profile contracts – e.g. Leisure Services, Waste. The cabinet were perplexed that this had not been put into place by O&S as they see it as a useful tool to "deep dive" on issues. However, O&S members felt they did not have the opportunity to use best value reviews.

Lead Officer and Agenda Setting

- The role of scrutiny officer is shared throughout committee services which raises the question concerning where the knowledge of the O&S committee's working comes from. It appears there is no consistency within the committee services element of the administration of the committee.

- A dedicated officer could lead to positive agenda setting / work planning with the chair and vice chair of O&S and ensure that there was cabinet member involvement.

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- The process of considering an O&S agenda item is not well defined and can become a general debate, rather than an accountability mechanism. A clear process could be written to ensure there is a sequence of involvement, respecting roles. e.g. 1) Portfolio holder (PH) presents. 2) PH is questioned. 3) Officer is questioned. 4) Decision / report is debated by scrutiny members. 5) Recommendation is made by scrutiny members.

- Need more proactive agenda setting, for example through an annual workshop to set an initial proactive workplan for the year.

- Scrutiny appears to often come too late in the process to have an effective impact on pre-scrutiny decisions (same report as cabinet) and too early in the process (feeds into cabinet) to be effective at post decision scrutiny holding cabinet to account.

- It has been stated that the agendas for O&S are sent to O&S members without any recourse to the chair – if this is the case then there is likely to be an issue with democratic services understanding the chair's role, as the chair is the person who ensures members views determine items for debate.

- The officers within democratic services are new to the authority, which may be leading to an imbalance of agenda setting, which should be led by members.

- It is understood that some officers perceive O&S as a means to "catch officers out".

- There was a concern raised that there was at least one occasion where an officer felt they had been "attacked" at O&S – it is important that meetings are organised and chaired in a way that promotes appropriate behaviour, robust but not discourteous.

Training

- The council was asked to provide details regarding the numbers of members who have attended the original O&S training and detail concerning any follow up of those that did not attend. To date no detail or information has been made available to peers.

- Training for new members is both vital and essential so that the new members do make a positive stance and take part in the scrutiny process.

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Recommendations:

- Establish proactive annual programme of work and agenda setting.
- Provide O&S training in chairing skills.
- Training in scrutiny questioning skills (KLOE).
- Ensure the scrutiny committee actively follow up on all recommendations.
- Consideration should be given by the cabinet and portfolio holders on how they can carry out their role in a way that supports scrutiny being able to act as effectively as possible.
- Ensure minutes reflect the decisions of the meeting – e.g. requests for agenda items to be recorded in the minutes and added to the forward plan.
- Cabinet members should consistently and without exception be expected to attend O&S committee meetings where decisions from their area of responsibilities are being scrutinised.
- The scrutiny chair or their representative should attend all cabinet meetings to present scrutiny findings, particularly to enable the thinking and debate around the recommendations to be clearly communicated with the cabinet to maximise the impact scrutiny can have on decisions.
- Where cabinet do not accept an O&S recommendation, reasons should be given.

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Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR)

Strengths:

- Financial risks are considered, but only the financial aspects of any other risk.
- FAR is involved in the budget setting process.
- Provides focus for finance trained councillors to specialise.

Areas for Development:

Membership of committees

- Training is given to the FAR membership. Members should have some interest in the committee itself and have a rudimentary understanding of local government finance.

  Members should read and understand the papers sent to them in good time ahead of the scrutiny meeting to actively inform their question and scrutiny preparation.
- The finance and IT cabinet member attends the meeting as an observer and is only called upon to respond to any questions that are not fully answered by the lead finance officer.
- All other officers attend meetings virtually, which can cause problems with IT failures. Consideration should be given to attending in person.
- FAR members should actively engage in all skills audits to support the identification of any ongoing training and development requirements, to support members in being effective in their committee role.

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Recommendations:

- Ensure a skills audit for all members is conducted at the beginning of the council term as part of the induction process to support groups in making the best appointments to committees.

Meeting Structure

- Consideration should be given for the audit and risk element of this committee to be a committee in its own right.

Risk

At an appropriate point, review the new process for monitoring corporate risks.

- All FAR committee members have access to the council's risk register. It would be timely to remind all members how to access the risk register, whilst reminding them officers are happy to assist as appropriate.

- Clarity is required over who chooses the risks for review that go to FAR and what criteria is used to ensure this process is transparent, clearly understood and objective. The committee should be reminded of the existing processes.

- If the risk management champion is a cabinet member how does FAR committee ensure they are being kept properly informed and updated on the risks they review?

- Risk Implications in the Annual Governance Statement – states: "The risk and opportunities management strategy require the finance audit and risk committee to consider regular report on the council's corporate risk. Failure to provide the committee with regular updates would conflict with the agreed strategy and would mean that the committee could not provide assurance to cabinet that the council's identified corporate risks are being managed.

- In para 7.2 it states that FAR recommended the changes and they were referred on to cabinet and approved – yet they were not mentioned in this agenda item, are the recommendations referred to in the minutes of the meeting of September 2021. Formal reference back should be made.

- All members should be reminded they can access the risk register by contacting democratic services.

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Additional Observations

- It was suggested that those prospective FAR committee members should be given a realistic understanding of the workload and role on the committee.

- Finance scrutiny is not being undertaken in a scrutiny committee; this means that some of the holding to account functions are not being carried out in regard to the finance portfolio holder.

- FAR is experiencing a high turnover of members and is not therefore seeing the benefit of being a “specialist” committee.

Recommendations:

- Put into place training for the whole council and experiment with how training could be more effective for the 2024 new intake. Including an introduction to local government finance.

- Consider how the provision of all committee development & training can be improved to increase knowledge transfer and support members with ongoing training needs e.g. use of one-to-one coaching, the provision of feedback from live meetings, further training to fill any gaps in knowledge and skills.

- Split finance scrutiny from audit and risk. The scrutiny of finance should sit with a scrutiny committee rather than in the audit and risk committee.

- After the audit and risk function had been split from the finance (scrutiny) role, the new audit committee should focus on understanding their audit role and undertake a self-assessment of the role of an effective audit committee.

- Enhance the status of a new audit & risk committee.

- Consider an easier way for members to view the risk register.

- Support members with better understanding of the council’s risks.

- Minutes to reflect the decisions of the meeting – i.e. requests for agenda items to be in the minutes and added to the forward plan.

- Conduct a skills audit of all members at induction training to support groups in making appropriate appointments to committees.

- Ensure that every member of the community can easily access information about council meetings.

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Next Steps

- Following the review of this document, at your request, peers can be assembled to discuss any aspect of their work to further explain or provide feedback relating to one or both committees as requested.
- The LGA can also advise on further support and training relating to the recommendations made by peers.

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CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

THE ALLOCATION OF DLUHC'S HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION GRANT AND DOMESTIC ABUSE FUNDING AWARDS FOR 2023/24 AND 2024/25

REPORT OF SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR SEAN PRENDERGAST

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. Demand for the Council's homelessness services remains high with the need to secure provision for accommodation and support services for single homeless people, especially those with complex support needs, particularly pressing.

1.2. The Council has received Homelessness Prevention Grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), totalling £746k over the two-year period 2023/24 – 2024/25. In order to help it meet its duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, the Council has also received additional Homelessness Prevention Grant funding totalling £71k over 2023/24-2024/25.

1.3. This report details proposals for the allocation of this funding for specialist homelessness services for local people.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approves the allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding as follows:

A) Keystage Housing (£134k in 2023/24, £151k in 2024/25)

B) OneYMCA (£172k in 2023/24, £172k in 2024/25)

C) SADA core housing service (£20k in 2024/25)

D) Rough sleeper outreach service (£35k in 2024/25)

2.2 That Cabinet approves the allocation of additional Homelessness Prevention Grant funding provided for domestic abuse duties as follows:

A) SADA Community Project (£35k in 2023/24 and £36k in 2024/25)

2.3 That Cabinet notes the recent DLUHC announcement of a Ukraine Homelessness Prevention Grant top-up for the Council for 2023/24

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. There is an urgent need to secure accommodation-based support services for single homeless people in the district. Adopting the recommendations at 2.1(A), 2.1(B) and 2.1(D) would secure the provision of existing, high quality, local services for the next two years, which is in line with the priorities set out in the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, contained within the Council's Housing Strategy 2019-2024.

3.2. Domestic abuse remains a significant driver of homelessness. Adopting the recommendations at 2.1(C) and 2.2(A) would extend the core housing service that Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) provides the Council with for a further year and enable expansion of SADA services into the community. SADA is a local specialist provider of domestic abuse support and accommodation services.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Cabinet could decide against approving the proposed allocation of government funding. However, there would be an extremely high risk that Keystage Housing and OneYMCA would have to significantly scale down or withdraw their services from the district as they would no longer be financially viable at these levels. In the absence of these specialist services, the Council would once again have to place large numbers of applicants in hotels (which are often outside of the district as many local hotels refuse to accept Council clients). This makes it extremely difficult for clients to engage with and receive assistance for any support needs whilst also incurring significant costs for the Council. SADA also provides specialist services to local people and discontinuing these would worsen outcomes for those fleeing/suffering from domestic abuse.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 The Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Sean Prendergast has been consulted on all recommendations bar 2.1(C) and 2.2(A) owing to Cllr Prendergast holding an Other Registrable Interest as a Trustee of SADA.

5.2 The Deputy Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, Cllr Dave Winstanley, has been consulted on all recommendations.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 21 April 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. As a local housing authority, the Council has legal duties to assist households who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness, and to provide accommodation for homeless households in 'priority need' – primarily families and vulnerable individuals. The Council no longer owns or manages any housing stock and it therefore works with housing providers (some with allied support services) to meet local needs.

7.2. The Council receives allocations of Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG) from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which is ring-fenced to support delivery of services to prevent and tackle homelessness. Traditionally, HPG is provided on an annual basis, however the most recent allocation from DLUHC is for two years, 2023/24 – 2024/25, to enable councils to better plan

for services and improve stability of provision. In total, the Council has received an allocation of £746k over the two-year period.

7.3. The Council has also received an additional allocation of HPG funding of £71k over 2023/24 – 2024/25 to help it meet its duties under the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. The 2021 Act introduced the provision (amongst others) for eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse to automatically be assigned a 'priority need' status and therefore to be owed accommodation duties by the authority.

7.4. Demand for Council homelessness services remains high with the Council receiving over 1,200 approaches for homelessness and housing advice over 2022/23 and owing a legal duty to a further 420 households to help prevent or relieve their homelessness. Significant pressure stems from the growth in vulnerable single households (detailed in the information note to 21 June 2022 Cabinet), with this cohort making up almost 40% of main duties owed in 2022/23 compared to just over 20% in 2019/20.

Households owed a main housing duty by NHC

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Households owed a main housing duty	65	90	128	112
Of which:				
single households	14	34	58	42
homeless due to domestic abuse	3	6	11	24

7.5. Whilst domestic abuse has been a key reason for homelessness approaches to the Council for many years, the above table also illustrates the impact that the new domestic abuse accommodation duties have had, with a sharp rise in main duty cases arising from domestic abuse since the 2021 Act came into force.

7.6. In response to the urgent need for increased single homeless provision, the Council, working with local partners, is developing a new integrated pathway of accommodation and support for local single homeless people. New services for the cohort have been developed in Hitchin, at the PAIRS scheme (Provision for Assessment, Intervention and Resettlement Support) operated by Keystage Housing and at 20 High Street in Baldock and the Sanctuary Hitchin, run by OneYMCA (formerly Haven First). Both services deliver accommodation and round-the-clock, on-site support for local people on the single homeless pathway and particularly those with multiple support needs. Access to both services is through direct referral from the Council with the Housing team working closely with both providers to maximise positive outcomes for clients. Clients generally stay at the schemes for a maximum of 18 months, with the ultimate goal of moving-on to more independent accommodation.

7.7. Keystage is contracted to provide a service operating out of the former Lord Lister site in Hitchin for a minimum period of ten years (with flexibility built into the contract, allowing for the service to be adapted as the Council's needs evolve), receiving £200k of DLUHC homelessness grant funding as set out in the delegated decision taken on 13 August 2021. OneYMCA (then Haven First) acquired the 20 High Street site on a temporary basis during the pandemic. At its meeting on 13 December 2022, Cabinet approved allocation of additional funding received for these schemes from DLUHC, totalling £549k over 2022/23 – 2024/25. This followed a successful bid to the Rough Sleeping Initiative in support of the Council's single homeless pathway.

7.8 The district's rough sleeper outreach service, also provided by OneYMCA, is an important element of the single homeless pathway and has received Council funding since 2018. The service helps people sleeping rough across the district to access emergency accommodation and specialist support (including for those who chose to

remain on the street) and provides ongoing support in settled accommodation. OneYMCA is currently commissioned to provide this service until 31 March 2024, as set out in the delegated decision taken on 10 March 2021.

7.9 The Council has commissioned specialist domestic abuse services from SADA (Survivors Against Domestic Abuse) since 2019. SADA is a local service providing specialist support advice and crisis intervention, including emergency accommodation ('Safe Space' units are available locally and across the county). They are currently commissioned to provide a core housing service until the end of 2023/24, as set out in the delegated decision taken on 10 March 2021. The SADA service is embedded within the Council's housing service, with all clients, on approach to the Council and suffering or at risk of domestic abuse being referred directly to SADA for triage, advice and support as appropriate. Over the year 2022/23, the Council's housing team made 185 referrals to SADA with 63 clients referred to refuge spaces.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Demand for accommodation-based support services for local single homeless people remains high and there is an urgent need to stabilise provision as far as possible over the coming years. The Council remains reliant on hotel placements where alternative accommodation cannot be immediately sourced or where applicants' support needs are too great for current services. Future demand is likely to remain high with the current cost of living crisis, considerably stretched social care services and ongoing scarcity of affordable accommodation in the private rented sector locally.

Households in temporary accommodation (snapshot at year end)

	31/3/19	31/3/20	31/3/21	31/3/22	31/3/23
Households in TA at year end	85	93	136	104	97
Of which:					
single households	15	33	72	46	32
hotel placements	4	19	58	15	13

8.2 A significant proportion of the single homeless cohort have support needs, many complex. Over three-quarters of single households placed into temporary accommodation (TA) last year had a support need and over half had two or more. Mental health problems are particularly prevalent (over 50% of the cohort), followed by physical ill health (31%), abuse (22%), drug and/or alcohol dependency (18%) and offending history (17%). One-fifth of the cohort have previous histories of homelessness and/or rough sleeping, typically because they have struggled to access support services in the past resulting in a repeated cycle of eviction and homelessness.

8.3 The Keystage and OneYMCA services are key pillars of the local single homeless pathway, providing valuable accommodation-based support services for local people, particularly those with complex support needs. Over 2022/23, OneYMCA accepted almost 100 referrals to their service, with almost 90% of clients presenting with complex needs. At the end of March 2023, there was a waiting list of 16 people. PAIRS has operated at below capacity since May 2022 due to community concerns around the service, with Keystage voluntarily capping occupancy at 10 rooms out of a possible 21 for an extended period. Nonetheless, Keystage were able to support 33 residents in PAIRS over 2022/23. The value of these services lies not just in the provision of accommodation and on-site support for clients but critically, in the bringing together and co-ordination of other relevant specialist services (health, social care, criminal justice etc) to enable clients to address and resolve their support needs

in the round, enabling them to move forward in all aspects of their lives, not just housing.

8.4 Without these services, the Council would have to resort to increased hotel use (typically outside of the district as most local hotels refuse to work with this client group), which comes at a financial cost to the Council and a far inferior outcome for vulnerable clients. Experience shows that without intensive help to address support needs, individuals will simply return to previous rough sleeping or other unstable accommodation arrangements. Many of the most vulnerable clients have already struggled to access, or do not meet thresholds of need for other support services provided by Herts County Council, Herts Partnership Foundation Trust, Probation, the NHS and other bodies.

8.5 The costs of running supported housing schemes such as the Keystage and OneYMCA services are widely acknowledged to be particularly high due to the high staffing ratios required to ensure that services are adequately resourced and vulnerable clients are supported. Both Keystage and OneYMCA have submitted details regarding the funding gaps they are currently facing, which would make continued operation of their services in the district unviable without additional financial support. It is therefore proposed to allocate the HPG funding received for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as follows, in order to secure continued provision of the Keystage and OneYMCA services for the next two years at least.

	2023/24	2024/25	Total
HPG allocation	**£364k**	**£382k**	**£746k**
PAIRS service	£134k	£151k	£285k
OneYMCA service	£172k	£172k	£344k
SADA core service	Funding already agreed	£20k	£20k
Rough sleeper outreach	Funding already agreed	£35k	£35k
Total	£306k	£378k	£684k

8.6 OneYMCA is in the process of securing the lease of its 20 High Street site for a further three years, pending Cabinet's decision on allocation of the HPG funding. Planning approval has also been obtained for an additional 10 bedrooms, providing a total of 29 en-suite rooms and communal facilities (including communal kitchen, lounge facilities and outdoor courtyard). Beyond this, OneYMCA are considering options for future development in the light of continued uncertainty around the future of the proposed Protea Way hostel in Letchworth which has progressed little since planning approval was obtained in February 2021.

8.7 Keystage has concluded legal arrangements which now enable it to be recognised as a housing association. As a result, the operation of the PAIRS service will no longer create subsidy loss for the Council, which will be able to recoup the full cost of Housing Benefit it pays on behalf of PAIRS residents from the Department of Work and Pensions, effective from 1 May 2023.

8.8 The proposed allocation of £35k for rough sleeper outreach will extend the service in its current form for one further year, into 2024/25.

8.9 The current agreement with SADA for the provision of its core housing service comes to an end in 2023/24 and it is proposed to use £20k of HPG funding to extend funding

for this service for a further year, into 2024/25. It is also proposed to allocate the additional HPG funding provided for domestic abuse duties to SADA, to fund their Community Project, which undertakes work in areas where there is known to be under-reporting of domestic abuse. The Project aims to support local victims, survivors and their families through 1-2-1 casework and to raise awareness more widely by working with and providing training for community partners including schools, police and Herts County Council. SADA is also committed to working with partners on local agendas including mental health, obesity and healthy relationships. In 2022/23, the Project received over 300 referrals and has focussed primarily on the Letchworth area. Allocation of HPG funding for the Community Project in 2023/24 and 2024/25 will enable SADA to expand the project further, into Baldock, Hitchin, Royston, and rural areas.

8.10 The DLUHC sent an email to the Council's Managing Director on 12 June 2023 advising of a Ukrainian Homelessness Prevention Grant top up allocation of £199,918 for the Council for 2023/24. This funding is ringfenced for homelessness activity and its aim is to maximise support for Ukrainians, whilst also more generally addressing wider homelessness pressures and to also target those most in need.

8.11 Future proposals for the allocation of any remaining HPG for 2023/24 and 2024/25, as well as the funding top up (referenced in paragraph 8.10) will be presented to the Cabinet and/or considered under delegated decision-making arrangements (confirmed in paragraph 9.6) in due course.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).

9.2 LHAs' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities.

9.3 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:

- homeless
- eligible for assistance, and
- in priority need

If an LHA fails to provide interim accommodation, or if the accommodation provided is unsuitable for the applicant, this can be challenged by way of judicial review.

9.4 The LHA also holds the 'Relief Duty' which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.

9.5 The Cabinet's Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.6.15; "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council".

9.6 When agreeing the Adoption of a new Housing Strategy (2019-2024) in March 2019, the Cabinet also resolved the following:

In the event the MHCLG provides homelessness funding beyond the financial year 2019/20, the Cabinet authorises the Service Director – Regulatory, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health, to decide on the specific allocation of the funds in order to meet homelessness priorities, for the duration of the Strategy.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council received a Homelessness Prevention Grant allocation of £363,909 for 2023/24 and £381,865 for 2024/25 from DLUHC, which is ring fenced for homelessness prevention and relief work.

10.2 The Council has also received additional Homelessness Prevention Grant of £35,337 for 2023/24 and £36,004 for 2024/25 to assist it in carrying out its domestic abuse duties.

10.3 The Council received notification on 12 June 2023 of a Ukrainian Homelessness Prevention Grant top up allocation of £199,918.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Although the HPG allocation for two years is to be welcomed, there is inherent uncertainty as to what (if any) funding will be available from 2025/26 onwards and thus longer-term stability of services on the single homeless pathway - in particular - remain uncertain. This has been reflected in an amendment to the existing corporate Financial Risk entry concerning the cost of measures to address homelessness.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 1. The assessment notes the potential positive impacts this decision will have for some of the most vulnerable members of the community in North Hertfordshire.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report, however, the proposals contribute to social value by providing community benefits that would otherwise not be realised.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the proposals in this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 No impact.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Ian Fullstone, Director of Regulatory Services ian.fullstone@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4480

17.2 Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4250

17.3 Isabelle Alajooz, Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy MO isabelle.alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4346

17.4 Reuben Ayavoo, Policy and Community Engagement Manager reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4212

17.5 Rachel Cooper, Controls, Risk and Performance Manager rachel.cooper@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4606

17.6 Jodie Penfold, Group Accountant jodie.penfold@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4332

17.7 Anne Banner, Benefits Manager anne.banner@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4610

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 DLUHC's Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations: Homelessness Prevention Grant: 2023 to 2025 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

18.2 DLUHC's Ukrainian Homelessness Prevention Grant top up allocations: £150 million Ukraine Homelessness Prevention Grant top-up local authority allocations (England only) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

1. Name of activity:	**Provision of specialist homelessness services for North Herts residents (allocation of DLUHC Homelessness Prevention Grant 2023/24 – 2024/25)**
2. Main purpose of activity:	• **To provide accommodation-based support to single homeless people, especially those with complex needs, with the ultimate aim of assisting clients into independent living.** • **To provide specialist advice, support and emergency accommodation services to victims of domestic abuse.**
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	NHC Locata database of housing advice and homelessness approaches. NHC assessment of single homelessness in the district, submitted as part of our bid to Rough Sleeping Initiative round 5 (RSI5). Information note to 21 June 2022 Cabinet: update on the demand for accommodation and support services for single homeless people. DLUHC Ending Rough Sleeping for Good Shelter analysis homelessness and BAME community Centrepoint LGBTQplus safe spaces ONS statistics Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales

4. Assessment

Characteristics	Neutral (x)	Negative (x)	Positive (x)	Describe the person you are assessing the impact on, including identifying: community member or employee, details of the characteristic if relevant, e.g. mobility problems/particular religion and why and how they might be **negatively or positively** affected. **Negative: What are the risks?** **Positive: What are the benefits?**
Community considerations (i.e. applying across communities or associated with rural living or Human Rights)	☐	☐	**x**	**Negative** **Positive** The single homeless pathway provides support and accommodation for local people in need across the district. The Council also funds an outreach service which pro-actively seeks to engage with rough sleepers, wherever they are identified across the district. The specialist domestic abuse service provided by SADA for the district includes work in the community to improve engagement, awareness and works with partners including schools and police.
A person living with a disability	☐	☐	**x**	**Negative** **Positive** A significant proportion of the single homeless cohort have support needs. These include poor mental health (over half of the cohort in 2021/22), physical ill health (one-third) and substance dependency (one-quarter). Additional funding for the pathway will enable the provision of intensive support for those with the most complex needs, many of whom would not be accommodated otherwise (and who have previously been refused access to or evicted from supported

				housing schemes due to poor behaviour and/or unmet support needs). Accessible accommodation is provided for within the pathway (although, generally, supply is a challenge because of the extreme scarcity of affordable accommodation in the district).
A person of a particular race	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** Minority ethnic groups are more likely to experience homelessness with black people in particular more than three times as likely to (borne out nationally and by our local data, with 7% of single people approaching as homeless in 2022/23 to date being black, despite comprising 2% of the North Herts population). Additional funding for the single homeless pathway is therefore likely to benefit this group in particular.
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness however local data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people applying as homeless in the district (19 in 2022/23, although a significant proportion – 20% - of applicants chose not to provide this information).
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** The vast majority of victims of domestic abuse are women, many of whom will have children and with some forced to flee their home for fear of violence. The specialist domestic abuse services funded by the Council are open to both women and men but service users will be predominantly women. Proposed extensions to the services will therefore particularly benefit this cohort.
A person of a particular religion or belief	x	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a particular age	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive**

				Young people are more likely to be faced with homelessness and rough sleeping (under 25s made up 19% of those owed a homelessness duty by the Council for assistance this year). Additional funding for homelessness services is therefore likely to particularly benefit younger applicants although decisions as to support and accommodation offered to applicants will always be determined by homelessness legislation and statutory guidance (as in all cases). Note that national evidence shows that life expectancy of rough sleepers is far shorter than for the population as a whole so interventions aimed at this cohort as a whole will promote positive health outcomes.
Transgender	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness however local data suggests a very small number of people applying as homeless in the district are of a different gender to their sex at birth (2 in 2022/23 although non-response rate of over one-third).

5 Results

	Yes	No	
Were positive impacts identified?	x	☐	Additional funding for the single homeless pathway and domestic abuse services will stabilise provision in the district for the next 2 years. Service users include some of the most vulnerable people in the district who, without assistance, will continue to face ongoing barriers to positive life outcomes (including repeated homelessness, exclusion from society, poverty and ill health) and lack of opportunity to address support needs.
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	x	☐	These interventions are aimed at those with the most complex support needs, including those with mental health issues, poor physical health, substance misuse and victims of domestic abuse (most likely to be women). Young people, ethnic minority groups and LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience homelessness, therefore these groups may also benefit more than others. Service providers on the pathway will be required to monitor and report on key measures of performance including outcomes by protected characteristics.
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	☐	x	

6. Consultation, decisions and actions		
If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?		
Consultation has taken place through the planning approvals process and through routine channels of communication with ward councillors, service providers and other specialist agencies in the local homelessness sector.		
Describe the decision on this activity		
See Planning decisions . Earlier delegated decisions relating to funding of services were taken on 18 May 2021, 13 August 2021, 25 January 2022 and at Cabinet on 13 December 2022.		
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively		
Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Regular and close working with service providers through formal and informal contacts will highlight any issues in a timely way.	Contract managers	ongoing
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?		
Ongoing and regular dialogue with service providers; formal monitoring and reporting as per contractual agreements. Separate DLUHC monitoring and reporting requirements of NHC for DLUHC funded interventions. Also regular internal monitoring of housing and homelessness activity, published in MIS.		
7. Signatures		
Assessor		
Name: **Tiranan Straughan**	Signature** T F Straughan	
Validated by		
Name: **Martin Lawrence**	Signature** M S Lawrence	
Forward to the Corporate Policy Team		
Signature** G R CHAPMAN		
Assessment date: **06/06/23**	Review date: **01/06/24**	

** **Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically.**

A copy of this form should be forwarded to the corporate policy team and duplicate filed on the council's report system alongside any report proposing a decision on policy or service change.

CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND – ROUND TWO

REPORT OF: MANAGING DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Following the first round of the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF), considered by Cabinet at its meetings on 31 January 2023 and 14 March 2023, the Government has recently announced a second round of funding and has provided an allocation to North Herts Council.

1.2 This report briefly updates on progress with the first round allocation and Cabinet is asked to consider and decide upon the Council's response to the second round allocation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet notes the update on the Local Authority Housing Fund and wishes to support round two of the scheme if it can.

2.2. That Cabinet delegates to the Service Director Regulatory and the Service Director Resources, in consultation with the Executive Member for Housing and Environmental Health and Executive Member for Finance and IT, the final decision on submission of the validation form.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To provide as much time as possible to investigate whether the allocation from LAHF round two is able to be taken up.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Cabinet could decide to cease all work now, on the basis that it is unlikely that a suitable proposal will come forward. However at the time of writing the report this is considered premature.

4.2. The Council previously considered whether it could directly deliver the housing for LAHF round one and for a number of reasons set out in previous reports concluded that it was not a feasible option. Therefore this option was not investigated for round two.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Relevant Executive Members and settle were consulted on LAHF round two.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report potentially contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision, which has not been notified to the public in the Forward Plan as the Council was notified of the allocation on 7 June 2023 and updated guidance on the process relating to round 2 was only issued on 13 June. At this stage the Council would be seeking approval to proceed and submit the validation form – which of itself would not meet the criteria for a Key decision. However, for completeness, it has been treated as such. It is not possible to defer consideration of this decision because the deadline for responding to Government is 5 July 2023. The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been informed and notice of the recommendation has been available at the Council Offices in Gernon Road, Letchworth for three clear working days prior to the date of this meeting.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2023 received a report "The Allocation of DLUHC Homelessness Prevention Grant" and an addendum report with more detail on the LAHF round one allocation. The first round of LAHF aimed to increase the supply of accommodation for families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement schemes (and so also providing a permanent boost to the supply of local affordable accommodation). The initial allocation to North Herts Council was approximately £2.6m to deliver 17 homes and required significant match funding in order to accept the allocation. That first allocation was split in to two types of property-main and bridging elements (4+ bedrooms). The main element assumed a property value of £287k (with Government contributing up to 40%, capped at just under £115k, + £20k for other costs). The bridging element assumed a property value of just over £506k (with Government contributing up to 50%, capped at just over £253k, + £20k for other costs).

7.2 Following discussions with local Registered Providers, settle indicated they were able to deliver one larger home (bridging element) and two smaller homes (main element). This offer was submitted to Government and was accepted. An update on progress will be provided at the meeting.

7.3 In March 2023, it was announced that the LAHF "would be expanded by £250m for a second round of funding, with the majority of the additional funding used to house those on Afghan resettlement schemes (ARAP/ACRS) currently in bridging accommodation and the rest used to ease wider homelessness pressures. The £250m second round of LAHF supports the Government's humanitarian obligations to provide safe and suitable housing to those fleeing their country. LAHF R2 will also support local authorities to acquire good quality, and better value for money Temporary Accommodation (TA) for families owed a homelessness duty by local authorities. This will reduce the usage of B&B accommodation and will enable local authorities to grow their asset base, creating sustainable assets to help manage local housing pressures on an ongoing basis." [Quoting from the email to the Council].

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. On 7 June 2023 the Government emailed the Council with a proposed allocation under LAHF round 2. The prospectus for the second round of funding, setting out more detail

on what it is for and how it works, can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-housing-fund-round-2/local-authority-housing-fund-round-2-prospectus-and-guidance

A further Q+A Guidance document was circulated by Government on 14 June 2023, which clarified that Local authorities which receive an indicative allocation can choose to only accept the Afghan resettlement element of the funding, however local authorities cannot choose to only accept the TA element of the funding.

8.2. North Hertfordshire has provisionally been identified as eligible for capital grant funding (under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003), with an indicative allocation of £712,000 in funding.

Resettlement element: we are expected to provide a minimum of 3 home(s) for the resettlement element.

TA element: we are expected to provide a minimum of 1 home for the TA element.

The online guidance states "Each local authority in scope for funding is expected to deliver a minimum of one bridging unit and one temporary accommodation unit." The expectation is that the vast majority of properties acquired will be family sized homes (2 to 4+ bedrooms), particularly given the average family size of those on the Afghan resettlement schemes. Unlike the first funding round there seems to be no difference between the expected sizes of properties.

8.3 As with the previous round of funding, the Council (or other partner) is expected to part fund or finance some of the required capital. Government funding equates to 40% of total capital costs plus £20,000 per property to account for other costs including refurbishment. The grant rate per property for our local authority is £158,000 (based on median property prices in the area) plus £20,000 per property.

8.4 As with the first round the Council is required to submit a validation form if it wishes to take up the funding. The deadline for submission is 5pm on 5 July 2023 and requires approval by the Council's s.151 officer.

8.5 The assumed property cost is higher than it was for the 'main' element of the first round. This may help in making this allocation more viable, but the Government contribution is still capped at 40% (+£20k for associated costs). The conditions of the first round funding stated that no other grant funding could be used to make up the Council/ Registered Provider contribution. That restriction is not included in the guidance that has been provided to date and consideration will be given to that other sources of funding may be able to be used in conjunction with the LAHF.

8.6 The Council has reached out to a number of Registered Providers to see whether any of them are able to assist with this initiative. An update will be provided at the meeting.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Subsidy Control Regime: subject to any successful allocation, we must consider whether the use of this funding provides a subsidy and or will contravene the UK's obligations under the Subsidy Control Act 2022. An assessment will be undertaken.

9.2. If successful in the allocation for funding, any arrangement with a provider would need to be covered by (at the very least), an agreement regarding its use.

9.3. Cabinet's remit covers, at 5.7.26 of its terms of reference: "To confer with other local authorities, government departments, statutory bodies, voluntary bodies, the police or other external agencies in order to discharge the responsibilities vested in the Cabinet." and at 5.7.28 To make decisions where a policy or strategy does not exist. The recommendations proposed cover such matters.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The grant available is detailed in section 8. Except for the £20k per property element, this is a capital grant. The grant conditions allow for it to be passed on to a third party, such as a registered provider.

10.2 As the terms of the grant seem to now allow other funding to be used by the Council/ Registered Provider, this could be considered if it would help overcome any viability gaps. Bearing in mind that viability was a real struggle with the round 1 funding.

10.3 If this was going to be progressed, then this funding would need to be added to the Council's capital programme. In line with the Financial Regulations this would be a decision by Full Council. This will need to happen prior to any spending of the grant, but it is reasonable (given the uncertainty) for this to happen after the expression of interest and memorandum of understanding stage. Especially as (as highlighted in paragraph 11.3) there would still be the opportunity to withdraw without any financial consequences.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There is a reputational risk from not being able to use funding that has been made available by government. This can be mitigated by communicating the actions that we have taken to try and use the funding.

11.2. We need to fully understand all the conditions attached to the grant, to ensure that we can recover all the costs through the grant that we expected.

11.3. The grant allows withdrawal at anytime, so there would be low risk from signing the expression of interest or the subsequent Memorandum of Understanding.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. Any property delivered through this scheme will be let in accordance with our usual approach.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There is no officer resource allocated for this work, given it was an unknown opportunity at the time that work plans were developed. Therefore any resource required to pursue opportunities to deliver the scheme will have to be identified alongside normal duties. If a partner is able to deliver the properties, the majority of the resource implications will lie with them.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – DLUHC Local Authority Housing Fund Q&A (updated 13 June 2023).

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None.

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Local Authority Housing Fund - Additional Q&A (updated 13 June 2023)

This Q&A document is intended as additional guidance for local authorities delivering LAHF Round 1 and or local authorities delivering LAHF Round 2. The relevant prospectuses for each round should be considered as the primary guides the fund for each Round.

LAHF R1 provides £500 million of funding for local authorities in England to obtain accommodation for families with housing needs who have arrived in the UK via **Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement** and relocation schemes. LAHF R1 aims to deliver the majority of homes by November 2023. Initial allocations for LAHF R1 were made to 182 local authorities (and the Greater London Authority for the further 33 London boroughs) based on which authorities faced the highest pressures. These authorities could also request to access reallocations of unclaimed funds. Delivery agreement for LAHF R1 delivery have been made via Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with local authorities. See the LAHF R1 prospectus at
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148035/Local_Authority_Housing_Fund__Prospectus_and_Guidance.pdf

LAFH R2 provides £250 million for a second round of funding (LAHF R2), with the majority of the additional funding used to house those on **Afghan resettlement schemes** (ARAP/ACRS) currently in bridging accommodation and the rest used to ease wider homelessness pressures. Initial allocations for LAHF R2 were made to 230[1] local authorities facing the highest pressures. These LAs will also be considered for additional allocations (from unclaimed funds) if they can deliver more homes. Local authorities that have not received an initial allocation have been invited to notify DLUHC via an Expression of Interest (EOI) process if they want to be considered for any remaining unclaimed LAHF R2 funds to deliver the programme objectives. See the LAHF R2 prospectus at
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-housing-fund-round-2/local-authority-housing-fund-round-2-prospectus-and-guidance

Note: LAHF R1 and LAHF R2 have some differing arrangements and operate independently. The announcement and terms of LAHF R2 do not affect or supersede the timelines and delivery agreements in place for LAFH R1.

This Q&A is relevant to delivery of both fund rounds as these rounds have many core similarities.
Where Q&A relate to one funding only this is specified (e.g. using **LAHF R1** or **LAHF R2**.)
Otherwise **LAHF** is used to refer to both rounds.

[1] Including direct initial allocations to 33 London boroughs.

Q&A Topics

1. How has LAHF R2 funding been allocated?
2. Requirements for LAHF R2 scheme participation
3. Local authority funding contributions to LAHF properties
4. What can LAHF funding be used for?
5. Grant rates and how funding is calculated
6. Fungibility - Is it possible to mix surplus grant scheme element funds?
7. Eligible cohorts
8. Payment arrangements
9. Tenure type and rent levels
10. Allocating / letting LAHF properties to cohort groups
11. Social housing legacy
12. Monitoring arrangements
13. Miscellaneous
14. LAHF R1 reallocations to London boroughs

1. How has LAHF R2 funding been allocated?

Q. Why are only some local authorities in scope for a direct initial allocation of LAHF R2 funds?

A. Funding for LAHF R2 was initially allocated using a formula based on need. All local authorities in England were given an overall ranking based on several sets of data, including their relative ranking in terms of the number of individuals in bridging hotels in their area as of 31 March 2023, and their relative ranking in terms of the level of broader housing pressure; see the LAHF R2 prospectus for a full list of metrics. These metrics were used to ensure that the areas facing the greatest current and future housing pressures have been prioritised in the funding allocation mechanism. We have allocated funding in this way to fund as many areas as possible whilst meeting the objectives of the programme.

We are inviting local authorities that are not in scope of an initial allocation to express their interest in reclaimed funding so that we may consider them, in line with the formula ranking, in the reallocations process. See the LAHF R2 Prospectus for details.

Q. Why are you weighting rankings to take into account the location of bridging hotels?

A. Local authorities have been ranked 50% on bridging hotel population and 50% on broader housing pressures. Targeting funding to areas with bridging hotels will ensure funding goes to areas likely to see more immediate homelessness pressures arising from the closure of bridging hotels. The capacity of local authorities to respond to specific pressures, such as the closure of bridging hotels, is likely to be more limited in areas of existing high pressures due to factors such as a shortage of housing and associated higher housing costs.

Q. Why is the bridging hotel data from March 2023?

A. The data from 31 March 2023, published on 25 May, is the latest published data on bridging hotels, which aligns with our principle of using published data for the purposes of transparency and data quality. The full dataset can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/immigration-system-statistics-regional-and-local-authority-data.

Q. If our local authority didn't receive an initial allocation of LAHF round two funding, can we still participate and how?

A. Local authorities which did not receive an initial allocation are invited to express an interest in being considered for any remaining unclaimed LAHF R2 funds to deliver the programme objectives.

The online Expression of Interest (EOI) form is available to complete at https://consult.levellingup.gov.uk/funding/a31a3c19/, and EOI form guidance can be found here. All EOI forms must be returned by 17:00 on Wednesday 5 July 2023.

We will review forms as we receive them and will endeavour to confirm to local authorities submitting an EOI whether reallocations funds are available to them from 24 July onwards.

2. Requirements for LAHF R2 scheme participation

Q. Where local authorities have received an indicative allocation do they need to accept both elements of the funding offered i.e., the Afghan resettlement element and the TA element, or can they choose to do just one element?

A. Local authorities which receive an indicative allocation can choose to only accept the Afghan resettlement element of the funding, however local authorities cannot choose to only accept the TA element of the funding. Their indicative allocation email details the number of homes in each element for which funding has been allocated. We will consider alternative proposals for reduced delivery of resettlement units on a case-by-case basis, but this may result in funding being reallocated.

Q. We won't be able to deliver all LAHF R2 units by the March 2024 deadline; can we still take part?

A. We ask local authorities delivering the LAHF R2 programme to commit to making best endeavours to deliver by 29 March 2024, to achieving value for money, and to sharing monitoring information with DLUHC on delivery progress. Delivery of the fund will be measured based on exchange of contracts, or equivalent milestone where exchange of contract will not occur, and the number of families housed.

Q. We might struggle to get through our governance timescales in time for the 5 July 2023 validation / EOI online form deadlines; can we still take part?

A. Completing the validation/EOI form is not a commitment to receiving funding or delivering the programme in your area. We strongly encourage all local authorities to fill out the online form by 5 July 2023 to let us know their intent and capacity to deliver the funding.

Once we have reviewed all validation/EOI forms and confirmed the outcome to local authorities, we intend to confirm any funding offer with LAs through signing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with local authorities. We expect that any local authority signing an MOU with DLUHC will at that stage have obtained all the necessary approvals to do so. A template of the LAHF R2 MOU is available here. We strongly encourage all local authorities to begin seeking necessary clearances to enter into a MOU (based on the standard terms of the MOU template and the information they provided in the validation form) to ensure

timely agreement of the completed MOU once we have completed our review of the validation form.

To receive a Tranche 1 payment by the last working day of July 2023, the local authority must sign and return the MOU by 14 July 2023. To receive a Tranche 1 payment by the last working day of August 2023, the local authority must sign and return the MOU by 14 August 2023.

If a local authority misses the deadline for submitting their validation/EOI forms or either of the MOU signing dates above, they are unlikely to receive funding at Tranche 1. Whether it is still possible to provide them with full funding will depend on when we receive the necessary details from them and the progress of the reallocations process (including the amount of money left to reallocate).

Q. Can local authorities which <u>have</u> received an indicative allocation, scale down the allocation of either or both elements?

A. If a local authority is unable to deliver their full allocation, we expect them to outline in the validation form the number of homes they can deliver. We will consider requests for lower delivery – these will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

If the Department agrees to a proposal for lower delivery, any funding will be scaled down proportionally to reflect the number of homes due to be delivered, based on the grant per property outlined in your allocation email.

3. Local authority funding contributions to LAHF properties – what can count as 'match funding'?

Q. If local authorities want to use the funding for refurbishment of existing stock – what counts as the 60% match funding?

A. This funding is to provide local authorities (as well as housing associations, and local authority-owned housing companies) with **additional** housing stock which provides for the immediate needs of the target cohorts and leaves a lasting legacy of social housing stock for the future.

The funding has been designed to be used flexibly – this includes using the grant to refurbish existing stock to meet the needs of the specified cohort. If the local authority already owns the home, it needs to be satisfied that its proposal delivers this – for example, by funding refurbishment needed to enable long-term void stock to be brought back into use, as opposed to using the funding to refurbish existing stock already in use. This grant is not designed to be used for routine repairs or Decent Homes work and is not intended to meet all costs associated with maintenance and upkeep.

If the local authority is satisfied that refurbishment would enable a long-term additional increase in stock, then it should ensure it spends the grant in a way which is good value for taxpayer money (and considers the income which will be received from the rent), alongside their financial contribution towards the property when considering what constitutes the 60% match. The overall intervention rate across their portfolio should be maintained.

Q. Can other grants or streams of local authority income be used as match funding?

Whether other sources of funding can be used as match funding will depend on the specific objectives and rules around those funds. Local authorities will need to satisfy themselves that the funding can be used in this way. In terms of specific sources of funding:

- **S.106 cash contributions**

A. Whether cash contributions secured by local authorities' s.106 can be used as match funding will depend on the specific wording of the s.106 agreement. Local authorities should check the requirements of their s.106 agreement and see if the agreement stipulates for what purpose the funding can be used. The local authority will need to be satisfied that use of s.106 funds in this way is legally permitted under the agreement.

If the LA does use s.106 funding they should ensure that this still delivers a net increase in the combined number/value of affordable and LAHF properties (reflecting the number of units funded via this programme), on top of the number which would have been delivered otherwise without this grant.

- **Afghan support tariffs**

A. The current funding instructions for the 2023/24 financial year allow local authorities to use the new flexible housing funding (£7,100 per person) and the existing bridging hotel wraparound funding (£28 per person per day) flexibly, including for (but not limited to) rental top-ups, landlord incentives, resource, and capital projects such as stock acquisition or refurbishment. These funds can also be used as match funding for LAHF R1 and R2 properties for those on the Afghan resettlement schemes (referred to as the 'resettlement cohort' in LAHF R2). Full details on how to claim the funding and eligibility can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-schemes-funding-instructions-2023-to-2024.

- **Affordable Homes Programme funding and Right to Buy receipts**

A. AHP funding and Right to Buy receipts **cannot** be used as match funding for either LAHF R1 or LAHF R2 properties.

- **Homelessness Prevention Grant**

A. Local authorities could decide to use the HPG for contributions towards LAHF properties, provided they are satisfied that the HPG resource funding should be used for capital costs associated with LAHF. However, given the significant pressures local authorities already face on their HPG funding (for example, to fund immediate needs for TA), we understand using HPG funding is unlikely to be a preferred route to fund LAHF properties.

Q. Does match funding have to come from a local authority? Does match funding from Registered Providers or Housing Associations count?

A. No, match funding does not have to come from a local authority – RPs and HAs can provide the required funding.

Q. Are any negotiations underway with Treasury to reduce PWLB borrowing rates for this scheme?

A. We are not conducting negotiations with Treasury regarding this programme.

At Spring Budget 2023, a discounted HRA rate for PWLB borrowing was announced. The rate of gilts + 0.4% will be available from mid-June for one year. Further details on this will be published shortly.

Q. Is there any resource funding? How should LAs fund the resource elements of this programme?

A. The programme does not include any resource funding. Local authorities can use other funding available to them for the resource costs incurred. They may also be able to capitalise revenue costs, although it is for their accounting teams to determine whether this is appropriate, and local authorities should ensure that the accounting treatment adopted is deemed compliant with the Code of Practice for Local Authority Accounting.

Q. Is there any scope for funding to be carried forward into 2024/25 or the scheme to be extended?

A. Funding for LAHF R1 is available in the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24 only and participating local authorities have committed to best endeavours to complete LAHF R1 delivery by 30 November 2023.

Funding for LAHF R2 is available in the financial year 2023/24 only. We ask local authorities to deliver the LAHF R2 in their areas with best endeavours by 29 March 2024. Delivery of the programme is measured on the basis of exchange of contracts, or equivalent milestone where exchange of contract will not occur, and the number of families housed. Where a local authority is not able to meet these deadlines, they should outline their delivery plans in the validation form.

Q. Can local authorities access the PWLB project rate to finance acquisitions?

A. The PWLB lending facility is operated by the UK Debt Management Office (DMO) on behalf of HM Treasury. Individual local authorities should consider the guidance at https://www.dmo.gov.uk/responsibilities/local-authority-lending/ when determining financing arrangements for its contributory share of funding.

4. What can LAHF funding be used for?

Q. Can we buy affordable units secured through s.106 for LAHF?

This will depend on the specific wording of the s.106 agreement in place, and the way in which you are looking to deliver the LAHF programme.

If the LA does buy affordable units secured through s.106 they should ensure that this still delivers a net increase in the combined number/value of affordable and LAHF properties (reflecting the number of units funded via this programme), on top of the number which would have been delivered otherwise without this grant.

Q. How would it work if we wanted to buy shared ownership homes to use for this programme, as they may have Affordable Homes grant attached, which is precluded from use?

A. Local authorities should ensure that they are not double grant funding properties in a way which might lead them to breach previous commitments. On buying shared ownership

properties funded through grant funding programmes such as the Affordable Homes Programme, local authorities should consult their individual grant agreements to determine how to proceed.

Q. Can LAHF delivery be met by buying properties on the open market?

A. Yes, buying freehold or (long term) leasehold properties on the open market is included in the LAHF R1 and LAHF R2 prospectus as part of the following option: 'Acquiring, refurbishing and/or converting non-local authority owned residential or non-residential buildings, including bringing empty or dilapidated properties back into use'.

Q. Can local authorities use the TA element (of LAHF R2 funding) to support families into settled accommodation?

A. Where appropriate, local authorities could use this funding flexibly to procure accommodation which supports them to end the prevention or relief duty for eligible families.

Q. What can the £20k per property be used for?

A. The additional £20k per property is included to cover some of the further costs of obtaining a property which councils may incur. For example, this could include funding things like refurbishments, energy efficiency measures, legal costs, decoration, furnishings, or otherwise preparing the property for rent.

As above, local authorities may use this £20k towards the purchase of the property if preferred. See also the question "Is there any resource funding?" (in section 3) regarding the broader question of revenue funding.

Q. If we purchase new-build homes where there is no need to use the £20k refurbishment funding, can the £20k be added to the main grant towards the purchase of the property?

A. Yes. The £20k is a nominal amount for refurbishment costs, and LAs can use this toward the purchase of the property if they wish. LAs can determine how they use the £20,000 per property and how much of the total refurbishment is to be spent on each individual property.

Q. Do we have to use funding to acquire properties in our own local authority area, or can we acquire out of area?

A. Local authorities should aim to acquire properties in their own area wherever possible. Where there is a need to acquire properties in a neighbouring local authority's area, we would encourage close collaboration between the local authorities, to minimise the risk of unintended consequences and ensure there is a clear agreement on the treatment of any related tariff funding (and associated support to households). Local authorities should have regard to suitability requirements when acquiring properties for TA, including through taking into account accessibility to support services and other facilities.

Also note that it may be more complex to establish permissions for charging Affordable Rents on LAHF properties when a local authority acquires property outside of its borough boundaries. (See below question " In what circumstances can Affordable Rents be charged for LAHF funded properties?" in section 9.)

Q. Are we able substitute properties in existing stock to make allocations for the LAHF target cohorts (to speed up delivery) and then move the LAHF acquisition into general stock?

A. Yes, providing that stock is deployed for LAHF purposes and units are replaced to ensure the fund is delivering homes additional to those already available (reflecting the number of units funded via this programme).

Q. Can we apply the grant to spend that has already been incurred?

A. Yes, local authorities can include properties on which spend has already been incurred, if this speeds up delivery, providing that stock is deployed for LAHF purposes and the local authority ensures alternative delivery any units brought into LAHF in this way, i.e. the LAHF fund should deliver homes as per LAHF delivery numbers agreed, additional to any existing other housing delivery streams for that local authority.

Q. Can we use Right to Buy first refusal purchases for this programme?

A. RTB first refusal purchases could be used for this programme as long as their purchase does not use other grant subsidy (e.g. AHP, s.106 payments, or non-RTB housing receipts).

Q. Can I purchase LAHF R1 properties, or LAHF R2 resettlement properties, and manage them as TA?

A. We want to provide local authorities with as much flexibility as possible to shape local delivery according to circumstances in each area. We encourage you to read Section 2.1 of the LAHF prospectuses to assess whether options for delivery in your local authority can be delivered within the framework of the purpose and objectives of the fund. You will need to be satisfied that your specific plans are legal and deliverable.

Using LAHF R1 and the 'resettlement' element of LAHF R2 to *lease* properties for use as TA would not be in line with the objectives of LAHF R1 and the 'resettlement' element of LAHF R2 respectively. Depending on how the LA delivers this, purchasing properties to use as TA for this cohort may meet the programme aims however we expect that LAs should primarily seek to procure settled accommodation for this cohort.

It is up to local authorities to determine the precise rent level and tenure of homes in line with the fund objectives, but properties should be sustainable for the eligible cohorts.

Q. Is private sector leasing within the definition of stock acquisition?

A. We encourage you to read Section 2.1 of the LAHF prospectuses to assess whether options for delivery in your local authority can be delivered within the framework of the purpose and objectives of the funds. Using LAHF funds to private sector lease properties is unlikely to be in line with its objectives, given they may not deliver the longer-term aim of increasing housing available in the long term to support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities to UK nationals.

Q. For either round of LAHF, can we use properties already in other development pipelines?

A. Yes, however this funding needs to provide additional stock for and therefore if units are transferred out of a local authority's existing development pipeline, then additional units need to be acquired to replace these so that the net number of units still increases by the number of units funded through the programme.

Q. Can Local Authorities partner to deliver LAHF with housing associations which are not registered providers? (e.g., community-led housing organisations)

A. LAHF delivery routes can include delivery housing associations which are not registered providers. Local Authorities have flexibility to decide the most appropriate LAHF delivery route for their local setting and references in the scheme documentation are not intended to exclude delivery by non-registered housing associations. Overall, LAs should be satisfied that any delivery arrangements they have with a third party best assist the Local Authority in its best endeavours to deliver homes which meet the overall objectives of the programme.

Q. Can we work with one housing partner on the resettlement element and then another on the TA element?

A. Yes. It is for local authorities to decide on the best approach for local delivery and whether to deliver through (one or more) partners. Overall, LAs should be satisfied that any delivery arrangements they have with a third party best assist the Local Authority in its best endeavours to deliver homes which meet the overall objectives of the programme.

Q. Are there any restrictions on the types of properties that can be purchased? Are 'street properties' a preference to new build?

A. The fund does not have restrictions such as houses/flats or new build/existing communities and it is for local authorities to determine which kind of properties are most appropriate. For homes for those on Afghan resettlement schemes, LAs should speak with their SMPs to identify the type of properties (including location within their area) which would be suitable and would therefore be successfully matched with a household from bridging accommodation. For the TA element, LAs should have regard for TA suitability requirements.

Q. What sizes of properties should we acquire LAHF R2?

A. The funding is mainly based on the provision of 2-4+ bed homes.

For the resettlement element, we anticipate that there will be a range of family sizes on Afghan resettlement schemes who will require accommodating when hotels close, including those needing larger 4+ (i.e. five or six bed) homes.

To meet the wider needs of those who are or are living in bridging hotels we would encourage local authorities to continue to use their relationships with their SMP, each other, and with government staff in bridging hotels to identify the kind of properties that will be suitable to meet these needs.

Q. Can we deliver 1-bedroom properties if there is an identified need?

A. The funding is based on the provision of 2-4+ bed homes. We expect that families will be the primary recipients of LAHF funding. However, a limited provision of 1 bed homes or TA units may be considered because these better suit the needs of the eligible cohorts in the area or constitute the majority of the available stock to purchase.

If this means the average grant rate equates to more than the maximum percentage, the local authority is expected to acquire more units with this funding than the estimated minimum (or outline in the MOU process that less funding is needed to deliver the number of units outlined in their allocation) in order to ensure value for money and not exceed the maximum grant rate.

Q. Will properties be required to meet current national space standards?

A. Local authorities should comply with relevant regulations and statutory guidance, and should be mindful of TA suitability requirements.

Q. Can the government give practical illustrations of what partnering with other local authorities might look like?

A. One example could be 3 or 4 local authorities pooling their funding and working with one regional RSL who might procure across the common area, but local authorities agree to use properties as a pool rather than reserving access to properties only to the local authority that individual properties sit within.

5. Grant rates and how funding is calculated

Q. Can we negotiate a higher level of funding if we have evidence the funding is insufficient for the number of properties?

A. No, the grant rate per property is calculated relative to local property prices and therefore should reflect the cost of housing within the local authority. The programme is

designed to fund only part of the property, as is the case for similar programmes like the Affordable Homes Programme. In addition to the grant rate, there is also the non-ringfenced £20k per property to help facilitate the purchase of the property.

Q. The benefit cap is a massive issue across every LA in the UK, especially for larger families, does the fund account for this?

A. Yes, for LAHF R1 we take this into account by increasing the grant rate for the 4+ bedroom bridging element properties to 50% of lower quartile rents, given the additional challenges of providing affordable larger properties. For LAHF R2 we have moved to linking grant rates to median quartile house prices – to support local authorities in providing the right properties with rent levels that are affordable for households.

Additionally, families on the Afghan resettlement schemes and currently resident in bridging hotels are also eligible for the flexible housing funding of £7,100 per person, which can be used for (though is not limited to) deposits, landlord incentives, rent, rental top-ups, support with rent guarantees and capital spend. The Government is providing this funding in recognition of the need to find a significant number of properties in a short space of time. The funding instructions for the flexible housing funding can be found here: Funding instruction: Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme and Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (publishing.service.gov.uk)

Existing claims from previous financial years from local authorities for funding from the Housing Costs Fund (HCF), designed to provide rental top-ups for larger households, will also be honoured.

Q. Property prices vary significantly across the country - has this variation in price/cost been factored into the allocations?

A. Yes. For both rounds of the fund, the amount of grant per property is calculated relative to local property prices, and therefore should reflect the cost of housing in the local authority. In addition to the grant rate per unit on both rounds of the fund, a further £20k per property is added to account for other costs, including refurbishment.

Q. What is the 'median price' referred to in LAHF R2?

A. The median property price used to calculate the funding per property through LAHF R2 is based on the ONS data from the year ending 30 September 2022 (data for all house types): https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/medianhousepricefornationalandsubnationalgeographiesquarterlyrollingyearhpssadataset09/current/hpssadataset9medianpricepaidforadministrativegeographies.xls

Q. Are survey and legal costs included within the grants per unit?

A. The maximum average grant rates per unit are calculated in reference to the costs of acquisition or refurbishment that the council charges to its capital budget plus £20,000 per property. Eligible costs funded by the LAHF grants could include the purchase price, stamp duty, surveying, legal and other fees, refurbishments, energy efficiency measures, decoration, furnishings, or otherwise preparing the property for rent and potentially irrecoverable VAT incurred on these items. Local authorities should ensure they comply with the Code of Practice for Local Authority Accounting.

The local authority can determine how it uses the £20,000 per property and can choose how much of the grant is to be spent on each individual property**.**

Q. Why are local authorities receiving a grant per property rather than viability gap funding?

A. We have used fixed average grant rates to give local authorities maximum clarity and flexibility to meet local needs and procure the most appropriate homes in the delivery timelines we require.

6. Fungibility

Q. Fungibility - Is it possible to mix surplus grant scheme element funds?

A On fungibility, LAHF R1 and LAHF R2 have slightly differing objectives, target cohorts and grants per property and therefore different fungibility criteria apply.

LAHF R1 fungibility:

Q. (LAHF R1) In some areas bridging element or main element properties are more costly relative to the grants per units available. Can we mix and match across from one grant element to the other?

A. No, this is not possible. The grant per unit is for the portfolio of properties in each element (i.e. bridging element, main element), not individual purchases, so there is scope to spend more or less on individual properties within each fund element. This applies to both purchase costs and the £20k refurbishment allowance. However, a surplus from the one element grant cannot be used to increase the grant available for the other element.[2]

It would be open to a local authority to maximise the overall grant used if one element of your portfolio targets more affordable properties, leaving more scope to purchase properties for the other element – however the grant rates per element unit type are fixed and therefore the local authority would need to be comfortable about providing the appropriate match funding for all properties delivered.

[2] Note however separate arrangements apply for LAHF R1 reallocations to London boroughs - see section 14 for details.

Q. (LAHF R1) Can bridging element properties be let to both Afghan and Ukrainian families (or vice versa?)

A. Properties which are procured in relation to the 'bridging' element of the grant (i.e. those on Afghan resettlement schemes who are currently residing in, or have resided in, bridging hotels) can only be used for households on those schemes – i.e. ARAP or ACRS. The 'bridging' element cannot be used for households who do not fulfil this criteria.

However, whilst the two scheme funding elements are not fungible, 'main' element properties can be used to for both Ukrainian and Afghan households, as per the scheme eligibility criteria.

LAHF R2 fungibility:

Q. (LAHF R2) In some areas, TA element or resettlement element properties are more costly relative to the grant per units available. Can we mix and match across from one grant element to the other?

A. Yes, this is possible. In LAHF R2 both the TA element and the resettlement element properties have the same grant per unit and the same property sizes. Local authorities can blend the funding elements as long as they meet the overall delivery requirements for each property stream. Local authorities should also note that the grant per unit is for the portfolio of properties in each element (i.e. bridging element, main element), not individual purchases, so there is scope to spend more or less on individual properties within each fund element. This applies to both purchase costs and the 20k refurbishment allowance.

7. Eligible cohorts

Q. Would families resettling from Hong Kong be eligible?

A. No, families resettling from Hong Kong would not be eligible. This programme is designed to respond to the large and unanticipated pressures from the significant numbers of arrivals from Ukraine and Afghanistan. LAHF R1 and LAHF R2 are therefore focused only on these cohorts.

Q. Would single households be eligible for LAHF properties ?

A. Given the purpose of LAHF funding to increase resettlement provision and improve homelessness provision, we expect that families will be the primary recipients of LAHF properties however allocations to single households could be appropriate if this best suits the needs of the eligible cohorts in the area.

Q. Can LAHF R1 bridging element properties be let to both Afghan and Ukrainian households

A. No, properties which are procured in relation to the bridging element of the grant (i.e. 4+ bedroom properties) are only for larger households who are currently residing in, or have resided in Home Office bridging hotels. They cannot be used for Ukrainian households.

However, whilst the two scheme funding elements are not fungible, 'main' element properties can be used to for both Ukrainian and Afghan households, as per the scheme eligibility criteria.

Q. Should lettings to LAHF R2 resettlement element properties be restricted to Afghan households?

A. Yes, properties which are procured in relation to the resettlement element of the grant are only for households on ARAP/ ACRS schemes who are currently residing in, or have resided in Home Office bridging hotels.
Properties procured in relation to the TA element of the grant could also be let to the resettlement cohort where this is the best response to local homelessness pressures.

8. Payment arrangements

Q. If a non-stock holding local authority partners with a housing association for delivery, will the funding be paid direct to the housing association if an application to the fund is successful?

A. No, funding will be paid to the local authority as this fund is being delivered via a section 31 grant. The local authority can then pay this to the **housing association** if this is how they choose to deliver the scheme.

Q. Is the sale of LAHF funded properties restricted? Do sale receipts need to be repaid or recycled?

A. LAHF funding does not place restrictions on the sale of properties purchased, or the receipts from such sales.

However, the LAHF prospectus and MOU highlight the programme's aim to deliver a housing legacy, i.e., "to create a lasting supply of affordable housing for the general population" which is available for the lifetime of the properties. To best achieve this, we recommend that local authorities:

- ensure VFM assessments of their delivery plans give due regard to programme aims for long term housing legacy
- ensure that any contractual arrangements or MOU frameworks they adopt with partner housing providers include appropriate mechanisms to reflect the LAHF programme objectives (including specifying any desired restrictions or expectations regarding disposals)

Note: this clarifies and corrects LAHF R1 prospectus guidance which stated

at 3.4 that if properties are *disposed of*, they will be subject to the Recycled Capital Grant regulations. These regulations will not apply to funding provided by DLUHC direct to Local Authorities under LAHF. However, separate arrangements apply where the Greater London Authority distributes LAHF R1 funds to London authorities – this distribution will be social housing assistance as defined in section 32(13) of HRA 2008 and therefore Recycled Capital Grant funding regulations will apply to properties funded via this route.

9. Tenure type and rent levels

Q. What will the expected tenure be for LAHF properties?

A. It is up to local authorities to determine the precise rent level and tenure of homes in line with the fund objectives, but properties should be sustainable for the eligible cohorts. The tenure offered should afford occupants appropriate security relative to expected length of residence.

Q. What rents can be charged in LAHF funded properties?

A. It is expected that all homes delivered through this fund will be affordable/low-cost housing both in the immediate term, and to support wider local authority housing and homelessness responsibilities for the remainder of their lifetime.

It is up to local authorities to determine the precise rent level and tenure of homes in line with the fund objectives and other existing rules/regulations. This could include social rent, Affordable Rent, or a discounted private rent for resettled housing.

Q. Will the recent rent cap on social housing rents apply to LAHF funded properties?

A. If social rents are charged for LAHF properties these will not be subject to the recent rent cap, given they are new rentals.

Q. **What rents can be charged in LAHF funded Temporary Accommodation properties?**
A. All temporary accommodation rents should be low cost / affordable to the occupants and in line with Housing Benefit Subsidy regulations for property types.

Q. In what circumstances can Affordable Rents be charged for LAHF funded properties?

The LAHF R1 and R2 prospectuses set out: “It is up to local authorities to determine the precise rent level and tenure of homes in line with the fund objectives. This could include social rent, Affordable Rent, or a discounted private rent.”

If local authorities decide that Affordable Rent is an appropriate rent structure for their LAHF R2 delivery, those authorities and partner Registered Providers will want to be confident that they have complied with the relevant Rent Standard requirements.

Under the Rent Standard, Affordable Rent may only be charged in certain limited circumstances which include where the accommodation is provided pursuant to an agreement between a local authority and the Secretary of State, and the accommodation is permitted by that agreement to be let at an affordable rent (paragraph 3.8b).

Local authorities delivering LAHF R1 properties, that wish to charge Affordable Rent (or enable their partner Registered Providers to charge affordable rent) are invited to agree an addendum to their main LAHF R1 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DLUHC. This agreement will enable Affordable Rent to be charged for relevant properties as defined in the MOU. Interested LAHF R1 local authorities can arrange an MOU addendum by contacting the LAHF team at LAHF@levellingup.gov.uk

For those local authorities delivering LAHF R2 properties that wish to charge Affordable Rent (or enable their partner Registered Providers to charge affordable rent) the LAHF R2 MOU includes terms to enable Affordable Rent to be charged for relevant properties as defined in the MOU.

Note that any permissions to charge Affordable Rents for LAHF properties via the above MOU process would only become effective from the date of the MOU/ MOU addendum agreement.

Local authorities and partner Registered Providers should be note that this agreement does not give Registered Providers permission to convert existing social rent homes to Affordable Rent and that this agreement only relates to LAHF properties within the borough boundaries of the Council which is party to the MOU.

Separate permission arrangements apply where the Greater London Authority distributes LAHF funds to London authorities and other Registered Providers for the delivery of homes within London. In accordance with the Rent Standard (paragraph 3.8a), an Affordable Rent may be charged where the accommodation in question is provided pursuant to a housing supply delivery agreement with the Greater London Authority and the accommodation is permitted by that agreement to be let at an Affordable Rent. The grant agreements for LAHF funds between the Greater London Authority and successful applicants will constitute housing supply delivery agreements for this purpose.

Q. If we make allocations for the LAHF target cohorts into existing stock, and "backfill" with new stock would the permission for Affordable rents be for the properties used for the resettled households, or for the purchased properties which would be used for general needs housing?

Where permissions to charge Affordable Rent are established via the LAHF R1 MOU addendum agreement or the LAHF R2 MOU agreement, these permissions pertain to the properties purchased, rather than the properties used for resettled households.

Note therefore that if a Local Authority (or RP partner) lets alternative properties in their stock to the target cohort, the LAHF Affordable Rents permissions MOU would not extend to these existing properties (and for the avoidance of doubt would not provide permission for any change of HRA social rent properties to a different rent structure.)

Q. Can Affordable Rents be charged in LAHF acquisitions of former right to buy properties?

With regard to former right to buy properties, the restriction on conversion of social rent to affordable rent accommodation in the Rent Standard does not apply where a property has previously been disposed of, including through the right to buy, even where the property has been repurchased by the LA.

Q. What rents can be charged if Local Authorities deliver LAHF provision via Local Authority Housing Companies?

Under the LAHF grant programme LAs have flexibility on delivery methods, which can include delivery via LA housing companies. LAs also have flexibility on rent levels, albeit the LAHF homes should provide an affordable/low-cost housing resource.

An LA housing company may become a Registered Provider but is not required to do so, and it will be for the LA to determine the wider priorities of its housing company, including whether it is a Registered Provider.

If the housing company <u>is</u> a Registered Provider then it will require permissions to charge Affordable Rents (for which see guidance in above Q. "In what circumstances can Affordable Rents be charged for LAHF funded properties?")

A body that is <u>not</u> a Registered Provider will not be bound by the Rent Standard and is free to charge any rent it wants. However, the housing company can choose to set e.g. a sub-market rent (and LAFH local authorities using this delivery route will need to be satisfied that rent level are 'low-cost/ affordable' to meet the wider aims of the LAHF programme.)

10. <u>Allocating / letting LAHF properties to cohort groups</u>

Q. How should local authorities allocate to LAHF properties?

A. It will be up to local authorities to decide how to deliver and manage this fund locally. The local authority should make reasonable endeavours to prioritise households based on who (in the target cohort) are most in need when matching eligible households with properties. Beyond this, local authorities may use any lawful route that allows them to deliver this fund to cater for the needs of their area and to meet the wider needs of those who are or were living in bridging hotels.

Q. What happens if we buy a property but then can't let it to the target groups?
A. If the LA does not have individuals from the eligible cohort presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness at the time the properties are available, the LA should consider options which are in line with the objectives of the scheme.

To meet the wider needs of those who are or are living in bridging hotels we would encourage local authorities to continue to use their relationships with their SMP, each other, and with government staff in bridging hotels to identify and match families to suitable properties. Early engagement on the matching process will help to ensure that properties being delivered through this fund match the housing needs of families in bridging accommodation as much as possible.

Q We've purchased a property for the LAHF R2 TA element that will be ready earlier but have need from the resettlement cohort, can we use it for resettlement instead (or vice versa)?

For LAHF R2 (in which where both the TA and resettlement elements have the same grant per unit and property size range) this is permissible. However local authorities should avoid any redesignation which would reduce their ability to meet their overall delivery commitments for each element (i.e., delivery targets remain unchanged.)

However, for LAHF R1 a similar redesignation is not possible given the differential grant rates per units, and property size range, between the main element and the bridging elements of the fund.

Q. How can local authorities best meet the needs of those living in bridging hotels?

A. To meet the wider needs of those who are or are living in bridging hotels we would encourage local authorities to continue to use their relationships with their SMP, each other, and with government staff in bridging hotels to identify and match families to suitable properties. Early engagement on the matching process will help to ensure that properties being delivered through this fund match the housing needs of families in bridging accommodation as much as possible.

We would encourage LAs who do not have bridging hotels to consider if it would be possible to support families matched to LAHF homes in advance of that home being ready. Where possible, accommodating the household in your area prior to them moving into the LAHF property will help the household to integrate sooner.

The new flexible funding announced in March can be used to support this. While we want to minimise the risks of homelessness for all households, in cases where the council has accepted a homelessness duty (relief or main) for a household for the period until the LAHF property is ready for move-in, they would be eligible to claim the £9,150 per household homelessness funding as well as the wider wrap around funding (£28pppd) if placed in Temporary Accommodation for up to 6 months.

11. Social housing legacy

Q. When can these properties be made available to support wider local authority general housing and homelessness responsibilities?

Given that the LAHF R1 and LAHF R2 fund aims to create a lasting supply of affordable housing for the general population (see fund objectives at section 2.1 of the Prospectuses), we expect this stock to become available to support wider local authority general housing and homelessness responsibilities after the immediate needs of the eligible cohort have been addressed.

As the housing landscape in each area and the circumstances of eligible households vary, we will not mandate local authorities apply a fixed tenancy duration for housing funded through the fund, though in many cases this may be appropriate. If the tenancy is shorter than expected (for example, if a family leaves early) the LA should assess local circumstances to ensure that the property continues to be used appropriately as outlined in the Fund's objectives. It is up to the LA to determine when the immediate needs of the eligible cohort have been addressed and therefore the appropriate time for the housing to transition to being used for general housing and homelessness responsibilities. LAs will want to consider the level of housing need and homelessness presentations amongst the eligible cohort as part of this.

If the LA does not have individuals from the eligible cohort presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness at the time the properties are available, the LA should consider options which are in line with the objectives of the scheme.

To meet the wider needs of those who are or are living in bridging hotels we would encourage local authorities to continue to use their relationships with their SMP, each other, and with government staff in bridging hotels to identify and match families to suitable properties. Early engagement on the matching process will help to ensure that properties being delivered through this fund match the housing needs of families in bridging accommodation as much as possible.

12. Monitoring arrangements

Q. What sort of monitoring information will we be asked to provide for LAHF R2, and how frequently? Does the monitoring information for LAHF R2 differ to LAHF R1?

A. We ask local authorities to complete a short monitoring form every two months, with the first checkpoint for LAHF R2 in October 2023. This information is set out in the MOU between the local authority and the Department, and includes:

- The number of properties where contracts are exchanged, including bedroom size, whether the property is located in another local authority area, who will own the dwellings, and how the property was obtained.
- The number of properties occupied/ready to let, including bedroom size.
- The number of pending resettlement scheme properties pre-matched to current/former bridging hotel households.
- Total expenditure, including grant and other funding.
- Total committed spend, including grant and other funding.
- Total government grant used.
- Overall assessment (RAG rated) of whether delivery is on track, as determined by the responsible local authority officer.

We have based the monitoring information for LAHF R2 on the information required for LAHF R1 (with the addition of information on those resettled from bridging hotels), for consistency and to make the process as simple as possible for local authorities.

We have also aligned LAHF R2 monitoring touchpoint dates with the remaining monitoring touchpoint dates for LAHF R1 – see below

LAHF R1

Monitoring touchpoint	**Microsoft Form to be submitted by 5pm on the following dates**	**S151 Officer Statement of Grant Usage required?**
Touchpoint 2	8 June 2023	Yes, by 29 June 2023, if LA wishes to enable Year 2 payment in July 2023
Touchpoint 3	8 August 2023	N/A
Touchpoint 4	9 October 2023	N/A
Touchpoint 5*	24 November 2023	N/A
Evaluation	December 2023 onwards	

*Note, LAHF R1 touchpoint 5 has been brought forward slightly earlier than the 2-month mark to align with LAHF R2 touchpoint 2

LAHF R2

Monitoring touchpoint	Microsoft Form to be submitted by 5pm on the following dates	Section 151 Officer Statement of Grant Usage required?
Touchpoint 1	9 October 2023	Yes, if LA wishes to enable Tranche 2 payment in October 2023
Touchpoint 2**	24 November 2023	Yes, if LA wishes to enable Trance 2 payment in December 2023
Touchpoint 3	8 February 2023	N/A
Touchpoint 4	8 April 2023	N/A
Evaluation	April 2024 onwards	N/A

**Note, LAHF R2 Touchpoint 2 has been brought forward slightly earlier than the 2-month mark to account for the holiday period in December

Note also that the deadline for LAHF R2 initial allocations validations returns, LAHF R2 EOI returns and LAHF R1 London borough reallocations EOI returns all have the same closing date of 5 July 2023, to expedite confirmation of allocations to LAs, and assist LA preparations.

Q. How should we record any 'backfilling arrangements in monitoring returns (i.e., where local authorities make allocations for the LAHF target cohorts into existing stock, and "backfill" with new stock (to speed up delivery)?

A. Where a local authority does proceed with a backfilling arrangement, DLUHC requests that in monitoring information submissions, any responses relating to the property sizes and delivery route questions should be based on the properties acquired whereas property occupancy information should relate to properties used by client group.

13. Miscellaneous

Q. Households placed in these properties may need resettlement support. Are other additional sources of support funding available and will this funding follow the household?

A. This programme provides funding for acquiring properties only and does not impact the existing arrangements for support funding. Local authorities resettling households on Afghan resettlement schemes (including in properties acquired using LAHF R1 and LAHFR2) can benefit from the Afghan resettlement tariff support of £20,520 per person over 3 years to aid the wider resettlement and integration needs of the households in their area. See https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1159355/Afghan_Relocation_and_Assistance_Policy.pdf

For those in the UK on the Homes for Ukraine programme, Homes for Ukraine tariff funding for local authorities is paid to the local authority in which guests were sponsored.

Q. Households placed in TA may need additional support. Are other additional sources of support funding available and will this funding follow the household?

A. This programme provides funding for acquiring properties only and does not impact the existing arrangements for support funding. LAs supporting homeless households can benefit from the Homelessness Prevention Grant to support this.

Q. Will households arriving on various resettlement schemes be eligible to purchase these homes through Right to Buy after the eligible period?

A. This programme does not include any changes to the existing rules around Right to Buy. Whether a tenant has a right to buy will depend on how the property is held (who owns the property) and the tenancy, i.e., whether the tenant is a secure council tenant. For further guidance on who can participate in Right to Buy, see https://www.gov.uk/right-to-buy-buying-your-council-home.

Q. Is this programme similar to another model of funding local authorities to invest in properties?

A. The most similar programme is the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP), also managed by the Department.

Q. Are we expected to fully furnish the properties?
A. This is for the local authority to determine. We anticipate that most households accessing this housing will need support to furnish the property. The additional £20K per property (within the grant allocation) may be used for furnishings. As part of receiving the Afghan 3-year tariff funding, local authorities are expected to ensure that the accommodation is furnished appropriately (more detail is set out at the link below):
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/afghan-relocation-and-assistance-funding-instruction/funding-instruction-for-local-authorities-in-the-support-of-the-afghan-citizens-resettlement-scheme-and-afghan-relocation-and-assistance-policy-finan#schedule-1-post-arrival-resettlement-support

Charity partners may also be able to assist with furnishing properties.

Q. Can we can claim SDLT relief on this grant?

A. Yes, as part of the Spring Budget 2023, the Chancellor announced a change to the Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) rules to ensure that purchases made by registered providers of social housing using the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) qualify for the exemption from SDLT.

Section 71 of Finance Act 2003 (certain acquisitions by registered social landlords) is amended to ensure that purchases of social housing (as defined by Part 2 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008) made with the assistance of a grant given under section 31 of

the Local Government Act 2003) qualify for the SDLT exemption. This change has effect for transactions which complete, or which substantially perform, on or after 15 March 2023.

The purchaser should keep and maintain records to show that a grant or other financial assistance has been used for a particular transaction where the exemption is said to apply.

A purchaser will also need to maintain an audit trail of how any grant or other financial assistance is eventually allocated to a particular transaction or transactions.
Further guidance can be found at SDLT guidance at SDLTM27500 and SDLTM27510.

14. LAHF R1 reallocations to London boroughs

On 8 June 2023 London borough were invited to apply for direct reallocations of LAHF R1 underspends via an EOI process (further to the reallocation provisions set out in the LAHF R1 prospectus.) The details of the EOI process and relevant terms were set out in the EOI invitation. These questions will be relevant to London boroughs considering submitting EOIs in this process.

Q Are LAHF R1 reallocations to London boroughs separate from the LAHF R2 funding round?

A Yes, LAHF R1 reallocations to London boroughs relate to underspending which has become available from the LAHF R1 funding pot of £500m. Any reallocations via this process must be used to meet the objectives set out in the LAHF R1 funding prospectus https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-housing-fund

The LAHF R2 funding round is a separate to LAHF R1 with differing objectives but LAHF R1 London reallocations and LAHF R2 initial allocations and validation have a concurrent timetable.

However, both the LAHF R1 London borough reallocations EOI process returns and the LAHF R2 initial allocations validations and EOI returns have the same closing date of 5 July 2023.

LAHF R1 London borough reallocations and LAHF R2 also have the same delivery target of 29 March 2024.

Q Can London LAs bid for LAHF R1 underspend funding if they have already submitted a bid to the GLA for funding under the Mayor's Refugee Housing Programme?

A Yes, however, to avoid the risk of duplication and ensure successful delivery of the funding being administered via the GLA, DHLUC will not consider any EOI submission for a scheme or unit that has been submitted to the GLA for approval and which is still under review.

Local authorities may however submit a proposal which is *additional* to what they have submitted to the GLA, or which the GLA is not funding.

Q Who will decide if our LAHF R1 EOI underspend funding will be approved?

A As the EOI is for funding which is being administered by DLUHC, funding allocations will be decided by the department.

Q How will EOIs be assessed?

A The Department will use the London Borough rankings from the LAHF1 funding formula (adhering to the original to needs assessments) to determine awards.

We will allocate the bids in ranking order until the underspend pot is exhausted

Q Can London LAs combine the LAHF R1 funding elements to optimise delivery?

A Yes, to optimise the funding available and maximise the number of homes provided the LAHF R1 London reallocations funding elements are fungible local authorities may combine both LAHF R1 funding elements and utilise the overall grant to best deliver their proposals.

In adopting this flexible approach, the *headline cost* for their proposals must stay within the overall borough specific grant limits notified to each borough (i.e. the number of main and bridging homes must be commensurate with the total grant sought).

Q Will London LAs need to sign a new Memorandum of Understanding?

A Yes as this funding awarded directly through DLUHC local authorities will have to enter into a specific MOU with the department for this LAHF R1 delivery.

Cabinet
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) update and consultation report

REPORT OF: Service Director - Regulatory

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Planning and Transport – Cllr Ruth Brown

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Sustainability

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following public consultation of the draft North Herts Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in the autumn of 2022, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) has analysed the feedback and produced the attached LCWIP Consultation Report. HCC and North Herts Council (NHDC) officers have met with local groups and visited sites to discuss and review suggestions made through the consultation. All of this has informed some significant changes to the LCWIP, which are outlined in the attached LCWIP Changes Summary Report.

The next step will be for HCC officers to prepare a final draft of the LCWIP to present to HCC Highways and Transport Cabinet Panel. It is expected that this will be in September 2023 and that HCC will formally adopt the Plan shortly thereafter.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the Cabinet note the attached LCWIP Consultation report at Appendix A.

2.2. That the Cabinet endorse, with any recommendations or comments, the proposed changes to the draft LCWIP, set out in the attached LCWIP Changes Summary Report at Appendix B.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The LCWIP is a daughter document to Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan. Its adoption will guide and accelerate future investment in transport infrastructure that enables and encourages people to make more trips by active travel (walking, cycling, mobility scooter, and other legal low-speed mobility modes). This will help NHDC, HCC and the government deliver on their strategies for sustainable transport, public health and climate change; more specifically, to increase the modal share for active travel, and thereby to reduce air pollution and carbon emissions from motor vehicles.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Alternatives are not applicable in this case as the LCWIP is a policy document of HCC in its capacity as the Local Highway and Transport Authority.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. HCC, assisted by NHDC, held a public consultation on the draft LCWIP between 26 September and 14 November 2022.

5.2. The Council's Senior Transport Policy Officer made a presentation on the LCWIP consultation to each of the Area Committees; delivered Town Talks in Hitchin and Baldock; hosted drop-in events in each town plus Knebworth; attended councillors' community surgeries; and presented to events organised by Knebworth parish council and NH50Plus. A full list of events is included in the attached LCWIP Consultation Report at Appendix A.

5.3. After the consultation ended, HCC and NHDC officers met with Knebworth residents and businesses, and with Letchworth Cyclists to gain greater understanding of their concerns and requests.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are a ten-year strategic approach to improving the safety and attractiveness of infrastructure for walking and cycling.

7.2. The North Hertfordshire LCWIP sets out a detailed plan for continuing to build such a network in North Hertfordshire, with new and enhanced paths, road crossings and traffic calming (principally speed reduction) measures.

7.3. The government's objectives for walking and cycling up to 2025, set out in the Second Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS2) are to:

- *increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled from 41% in 2018 to 2019 to 46% in 2025*
- *increase walking activity, where walking activity is measured as the total number of walking stages per person per year, to 365 stages per person per year in 2025*
- *double cycling, where cycling activity is measured as the estimated total number of cycling stages made each year, from 0.8 billion stages in 2013 to 1.6 billion stages in 2025*
- *increase the percentage of children aged 5 to 10 who usually walk to school from 49% in 2014 to 55% in 2025*

7.4. Beyond 2025, the following further government objectives reflect commitments originally set out in policy documents, Gear Change, the Transport Decarbonisation Plan and the Net Zero Strategy to:

- *increase the percentage of short journeys in towns and cities that are walked or cycled to 50% in 2030 and to 55% in 2035*
- *deliver a world-class cycling and walking network in England by 2040*

7.5. The Active Design guide, published by Sport England in May 2023, describes what this policy ambition requires: "A comprehensive network of safe, high quality and easy to find active travel routes should connect destinations and provide feeder routes to homes. This should create a range of clearly signed routes for all potential or existing users, including a choice between busy and quiet, leisure and utility focused options, and should limit conflict between different transport modes."

7.6. The North Herts Climate Change Strategy states: "We recognise the many benefits of sustainable transport, both to individuals, places, and the environment more widely, and want to seek to reduce car use overall across the district in favour of public transport and active travel."

7.7. The North Hertfordshire Transport Strategy (NHTS) principles include: "Reduce the demand for travel by encouraging sustainable travel (on foot, by bicycle, by public transport, or via shared mobility) as an alternative to the private car."

7.8. NHTS policies include (with relevant extracts from the detailed explication):

Deliver a step change in cycling and improved walking within the main urban centres through travel behaviour change and better facilities

- *On relevant main routes, more segregation of cycling from faster moving through traffic (some highway capacity is likely to need to be reallocated);*
- *Quietways on other routes: these are continuous routes following quieter streets, parks and waterways and linking to key destinations. They overcome barriers to cycling by providing improved junctions and an alternative to riding on busy roads.*

A 'Sustainable Spine' corridor along the A505 [and B656] with a focus on enhanced public transport and cycling connectivity between the towns.

- *More and better crossing points for walking/cycling to key destinations*
- *Cycling links on the corridor*
- *Speed of traffic and road space allocation*

7.9. Local Transport Plan contains the following policies (with relevant extracts):

Policy 7: Active Travel - Walking

The county council will seek to encourage and promote walking by:

a) Implementing measures to increase the priority of pedestrians relative to motor vehicles, especially in town centres, and creating walking friendly town and neighbourhood centres.

b) Delivering infrastructure to provide safer access to key services, and pedestrian facilities to enable and encourage walking.

c) Identifying and promoting networks of pedestrian priority routes.

Policy 8. Active Travel - Cycling

The county council aims to deliver a step change in cycling, through:

a) Infrastructure improvements, especially within major urban areas to enable and encourage more cycling.

b) Implementing measures to increase the priority of cyclists relative to motor vehicles.

7.10. The draft Active Travel Strategy for Hertfordshire includes the following strategic objective: "Deliver infrastructure that meets the needs of our communities: Eight out of ten people support measures to reduce road traffic and two-thirds are in favour of reallocating road space for active travel."

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. In accordance with government guidance, the plan focuses on areas where interventions can make the greatest impact. This is predominantly in the most densely populated areas of Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Baldock, Royston and Knebworth.

8.2. Some rural routes are included in the Plan – Hitchin–Stevenage, Ashwell–Ashwell & Morden Station, and in Pirton and Great Ashby. Others have been rated as of 'primary' or 'secondary' importance but have not yet been audited. When more resources become available, perhaps as part of the government's forthcoming Future of Transport: rural strategy, HCC will consider additional routes, including in rural areas, to be audited and prioritised for investment.

8.3. The consultation elicited varying levels of interest and engagement across the district. The strongest response in terms of numbers was from residents of Ashwell, who lobbied for a safe route to Ashwell & Morden railway station. The strongest response in terms of sentiment was from residents in Knebworth, who were strongly opposed to most of the proposed interventions, in particular on the high street. Responses in Royston were polarised, in particular around proposed changes to Lower King St, Kneesworth St and Mill Rd. There were relatively few responses from residents in Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock, but these were broadly supportive of the plan.

8.4. The response to the LCWIP consultation has provided a broad range of local knowledge and feedback that we have used to help improve the LCWIP policies and proposals.

8.5. From the **1,239 responses** received we have identified approximately **48 changes**, which includes modifications to specific routes and proposals, updates to the LCWIP mapping, the addition of new policies (such as for equestrians), further information and clarity on key routes, and general changes to improve the overall presentation of information and accessibility of the report.

8.6. The feedback has also helped to identify future project validation work with detailed site investigations being carried out at the Ashwell/Ashwell Station route and Cadwell Bridge underpass (and detailed options developed), as a result of the strong response from the consultation. Further project validation work has also been prioritised in conjunction with the LCWIP feedback.

8.7. The most significant changes made since the consultation are:

a. Addition of Ashwell to Ashwell & Morden station (which will need to be delivered in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council)

b. Removal of some proposed interventions in Knebworth, notably on the high street; scaling back of interventions on Gun Lane and Pondcroft; and additional detail on the main intervention under the railway bridge, to use one lane of the carriageway to widen the footway and to install traffic signals to alternate the flow of traffic in the remaining lane.

c. Scaling back of the interventions in Royston to allow for more option testing and consultation before fixing arrangements for Lower King St/Kneesworth St and the A10 gyratory.

8.8. These and other proposed changes to the draft LCWIP plan and maps are set out in the attached LCWIP Changes Summary Report at Appendix B.

8.9. In additional to the changes identified to key routes and proposals, a series of broader learnings and insights have been obtained from the feedback which will be used to inform future planning. The key insights included:

8.10. **Safety**: Many comments highlighted safety concerns and risks associated with walking and cycling within their local areas. This included accident-prone locations, difficult or unsafe road crossings, and areas where residents felt there was inadequate infrastructure. We also received several comments highlighting risky behaviours of people driving and cycling that deter others from walking and cycling.

8.11. **Accessibility**: Several comments were received from elderly residents and people with mobility impairments and disabilities, highlighting specific sites and general concerns within their local areas. These comments reinforced the importance of regular maintenance of footways and cycle tracks.

8.12. **Connectivity**: Local insights into the connectivity of existing walking and cycling routes were provided which has helped identify gaps in the network or insufficient connections to key destinations such as schools, workplaces, parks, and public transportation.

8.13. **Economic considerations**: Economic impacts of implementing walking and cycling infrastructure were highlighted, in particular the potential impact on local businesses, tourism, property values and transportation costs.

8.14. **Usage and demand**: Useful information was obtained on usage of walking and cycling infrastructure, including footpaths, bike lanes, and shared spaces.

8.15. **Health and well-being**: The consultation feedback provided information on people's walking and cycling habits, which has helped to provide some insights into the health and wellbeing and activity levels of people within the district.

8.16. **Environmental impact**: General concerns about the environment were evident in the feedback. There was a strong consensus about the need to reduce traffic congestion, noise pollution, and improve the overall sustainability of the transportation system.

8.17. **Implementation and funding**: The feedback will help HCC develop detailed implementation plans and support future funding applications through local support and buy-in for specific areas/proposals.

8.18. **Stakeholder engagement**: While the LCWIP consultation received a large response, some groups were nevertheless under-represented, in particular people under the age of 30 (4.3% of respondents). 86% of respondents identified as white (87.5% of North Herts residents identified as white in the 2021 Census), 6% other and 2% preferred not to say. There was an even split of male to female respondents: 49%/49%, with 2% preferring not to say. The consultation elicited a poor level of response from schools despite proactive efforts to engage with them.

8.19. **Future consultations**: Significant learnings have been obtained from the consultation process which can be applied to future consultations.

8.20. Delivery of the LCWIP will enable more people to access a wider range of education and job opportunities, and to lead a fulfilling social, active and cultural life without needing to own a car. In the 2021 Census, 15.5% of households in North Herts did not have access to a car or van (8,781 out of 56,732 households).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. NHDC's role in developing the North Herts LCWIP is as a consultee to HCC, and therefore governed by the Duty to Co-operate in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Part 2 Section 33A (introduced by the Localism Act 2011).

9.2. The Duty to Cooperate is the mechanism for ensuring the right issues are addressed, in the right way, and with the right partners to maximise the effectiveness of policy and plan-making. The Duty to Cooperate is a requirement of the Localism Act 2011 and the duty requires the Council to cooperate with other local planning authorities and other public bodies in preparing and developing development plan documents and other local development documents so far as it relates to a strategic matter.

9.3. Section 33A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 sets out that to maximise effective working on strategic matters, the local planning authority is under a duty to co-operate with the county council in engaging constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in the preparation of local development documents.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are no financial implications for NHDC arising from this report. NHDC contributed £15,660 towards the preparation of the LCWIP, which was funded from the GAF Revenue reserve budget, with HCC funding the other two thirds of the costs. The consultation on the draft LCWIP was fully funded by HCC.

10.2. The LCWIP creates no financial commitments for NHDC or HCC, but will be used to guide future investment, primarily from government grants and Section 106 contributions from developers.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are no risk implications arising from this report.

11.2. Development and adoption of an LCWIP by HCC and endorsement by NHDC will greatly reduce the risk of missing out on future funding opportunities to deliver improvements for active travel. It will also assist NHDC in achieving its stated objectives within the North Herts Climate Change Strategy and North Herts Transport Strategy.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. HCC is undertaking an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA), which is expected to conclude that some positive and minimal negative equality impacts are likely to result from the North Hertfordshire LCWIP being adopted. The full EqIA will be reported to the HCC Highways & Transport Cabinet Panel.

12.3. Each scheme that is developed will be assessed in detail for its equality impacts and any necessary mitigations.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. Implementation of the LCWIP is expected to have a positive impact on air quality by enabling and supporting a mode-shift from cars to walking and cycling, reducing the vehicle-mileage by cars in our towns.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. There are no human resource impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

16. APPENDICES

- Appendix A: LCWIP Consultation Report
- Appendix B: LCWIP Changes Summary Report

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Draft North Hertfordshire Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (2022)
- North Hertfordshire Transport Strategy (2017)
- Second cycling and walking investment strategy (CWIS2) (2022)
- Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans – Technical Guidance for Local Authorities (2017)
- Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan (2018)
- Gear Change – a bold vision for cycling and walking (2020)
- Decarbonising Transport – A Better, Greener Britain (2021)
- Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (2021)
- Hertfordshire Active Travel Strategy (2013)
- An Active Travel Strategy for Hertfordshire (draft in consultation, 2023)
- Active Design – Creating Active Environments through Planning and Design (2023)
- Local Transport Note 1/20 Cycle infrastructure design (2020)

APPENDIX A

North Herts Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan

Partnership Project between

Hertfordshire County Council and North Herts Council

REPORT TITLE	North Herts LCWIP Consultation Report
REPORT AUTHOR	Dermot Dooher
REPORT CONTRIBUTOR	Edward Leigh
REPORT DATE	16 June 2023
REPORT VERSION	Version 2
REPORT STATUS	Final draft: Seeking approval for adoption by HCC Highways & Transport Cabinet Panel

Consultation overview

The North Herts LCWIP consultation ran from the **26 September to 14 November 2022**, led by Hertfordshire County Council in partnership with North Herts Council. The following report provides an overview of the key outcomes of the consultation and a summary of the engagement delivered by HCC and NHC.

The aim of the consultation was to gain feedback on:

- The primary/secondary walking & cycling networks
- The infrastructure improvement plans and proposals
- The prioritised routes and scoring
- The overall plan (Technical Report & Appendices)

Response to the consultation

Stakeholders were given several potential avenues through which to submit their views and responses:

- By completing an online survey
- By adding a location-specific comment on an interactive map
- By emailing the North Herts LCWIP inbox

The response rates for the different methods were as follows:

Total responses: 1239

- Responses via online survey: 703
- Responses via interactive storymap: 449
- Responses via email: 87

Further in person engagement was also conducted by North Herts Council where people could provide their feedback directly to officers and ask questions. Further detail and information on this engagement can be found in the North Herts engagement section of this report.

Overall support for the North Herts LCWIP

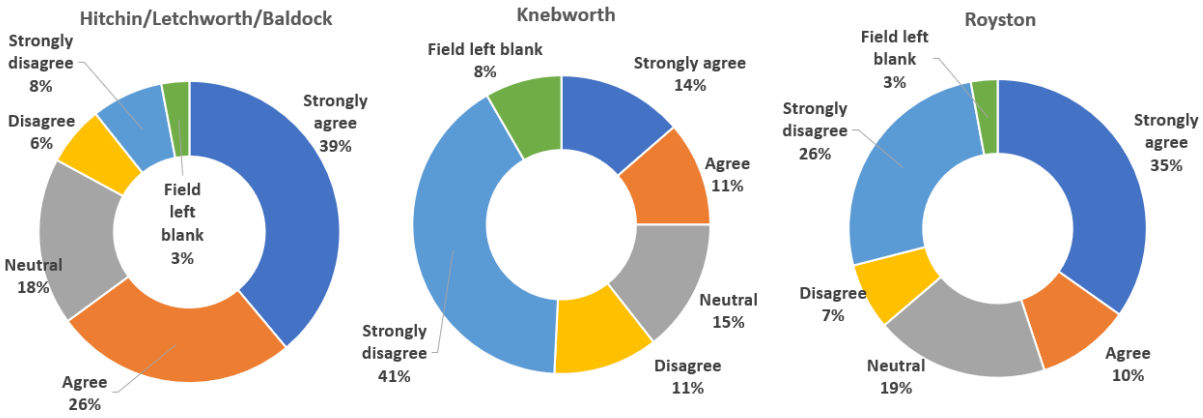
The overarching aim to improve walking and cycling across North Herts varied by location but was broadly well received and supported. When broken down by response types, the online consultation survey asked whether people *'[…] support the proposed approach of the LCWIP in improving cycling and walking provision across North Hertfordshire?'*

In response **73%** said that they supported the proposed approach and **27%** either disagreed or expressed concerns with the proposed approach.

For the storymap feedback, people were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposals. A breakdown of the 449 responses can be found below.



Overall, **49%** agreed with the proposals and **30%** disagreed but this picture changes by location, as illustrated below:



When broken down to specific areas:

- Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock (counted as one area in interactive map): **65% agreed and 14% disagreed**
- Knebworth: **25% agreed and 52% disagreed**
- Royston: **45% agreed and 33% disagreed**

This breakdown can be illustrated further by the positioning of the geolocated comments via the online interactive storymaps. The areas with the highest concentration of purple/red were supported while the areas with the highest concentration of orange/blue were not. Many of the opinions and comments expressed within the consultation feedback were influenced heavily by specific measures proposed. For example, in Royston many people opposed the interventions in the High Street area but strongly supported the A505/A10 crossing (as can be seen on the right below).

Knebworth



Hitchin/Baldock/Letchworth



Royston

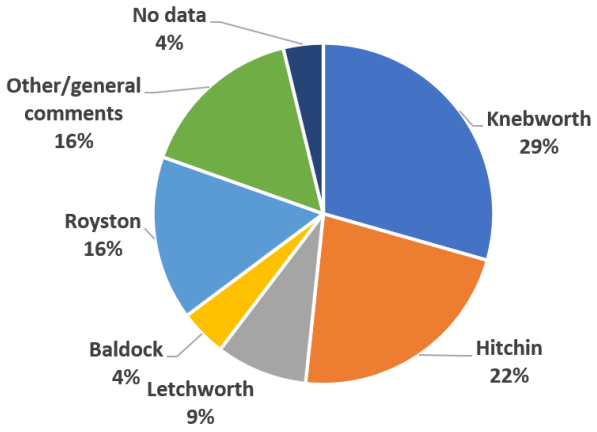


Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

Comments received by area

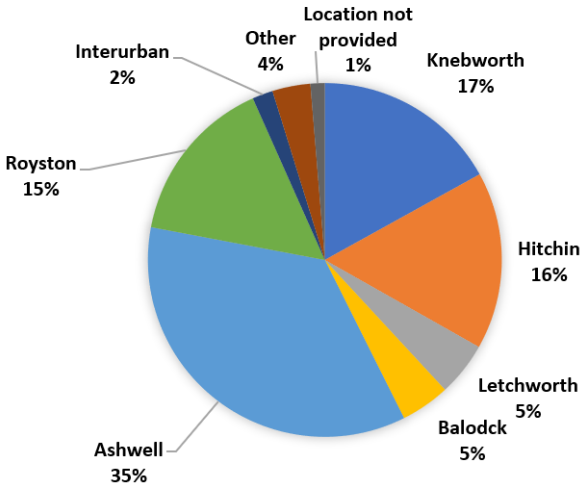
For the storymap/geolocated comments the responses were divided into three areas. Hitchin/Letchworth/Baldock were counted as one area but following a review of the comments a breakdown by each individual has been provided below.

Storymap responses by area



Survey responses by area

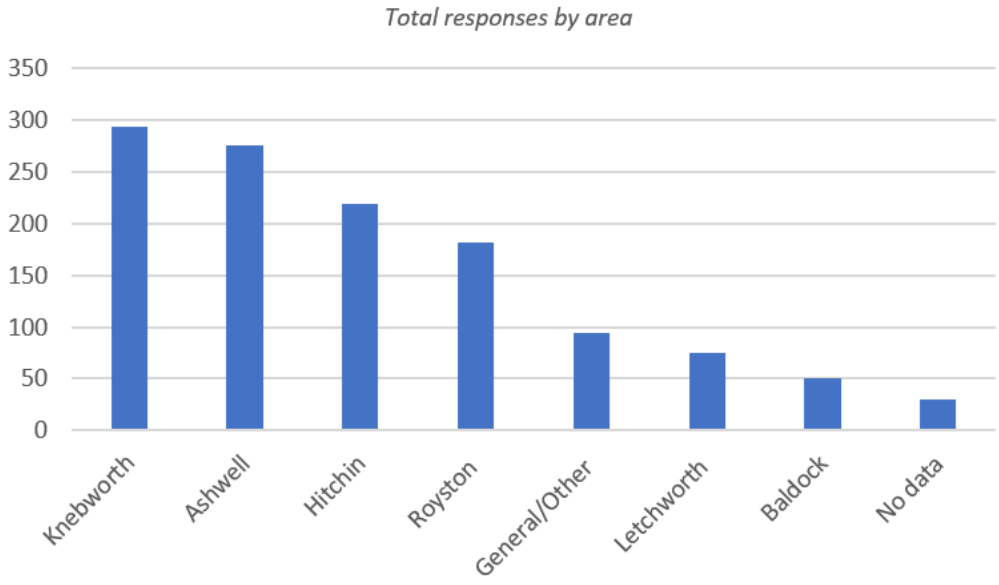
The responses for the survey provided a slightly different picture, suggesting that the different methods of responding (storymaps, survey, email) may have been publicised or shared more widely than others within the different areas. A notable difference in the responses via the survey is the overwhelming response from Ashwell Village which received over 220 comments, all of which almost exclusively campaigned for a route from the village to the station to be prioritised.



Email responses by area

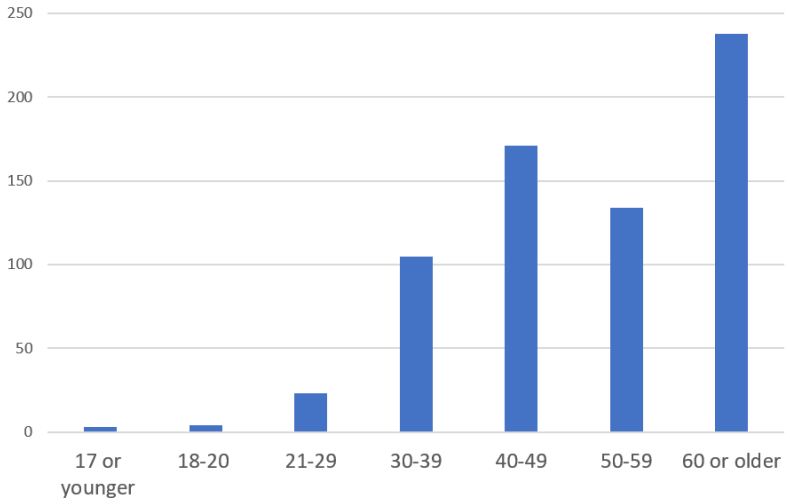
For the comments received by email, the highest proportion came via Knebworth (44), followed by Ashwell Village (28), Hitchin (7), Royston (6), Letchworth (2) and then Other (2). Many of the email responses covered multiple issues and areas, providing detailed insights and local knowledge.

When combining all datasets, the area with the highest response rate was from Knebworth and Ashwell (where there were clearly organised resident campaigns in place). Baldock was the area which obtained the least amount of feedback, as illustrated below:



Further insights from survey results

Age breakdown

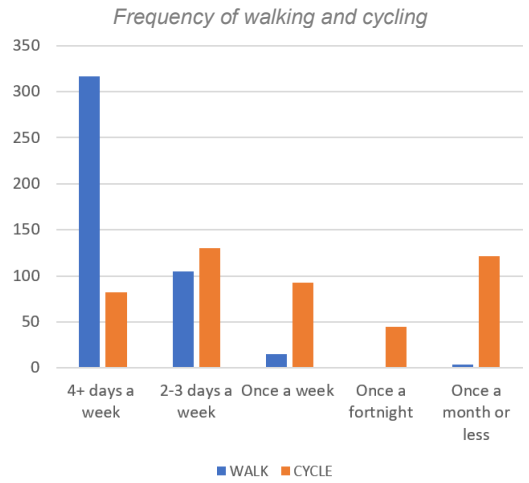


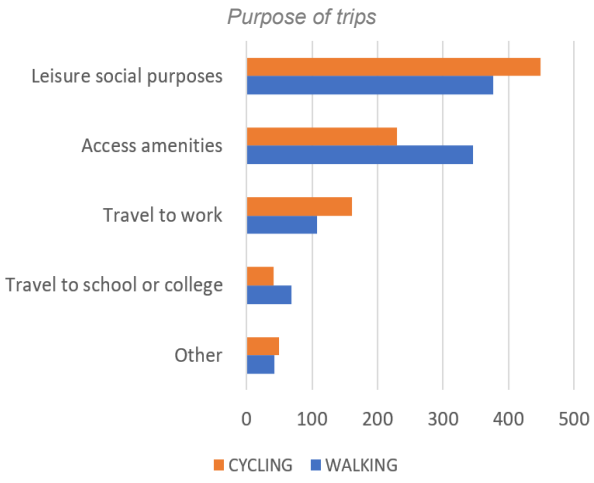
A notable observation from the survey responses was that 60 or older made up the highest proportion of respondents (35%) with under 30s making up just 4.3% of total respondents. The percentage of responses from over 60's was highest in Letchworth (61%) and Knebworth (45%) and lowest in Baldock (22%). The percentage of responses from under 40's was lowest in Knebworth (11%) and highest in Royston (28%).

Based on the above data, there is a clear imbalance in the ages represented. Each age group brings their own unique values and priorities which have the potential to influence the outcome of any decision-making process. By ensuring a diverse range of opinions from different age groups we can avoid the risk of skewed outcomes that may favour the interests of a particular generation and neglect the aspirations of others. Going forward it is important that we seek out the opinions of the younger generation (which are largely absent from these results) to ensure an inclusive outcome that represents the interest of the whole community.

Further questions were asked around ethnicity and gender. 86% of respondents identified as British, 6% other and 2% preferred not to say. There was an even split of male to female respondents (49% / 49%) with 2% preferring not to say.

Frequency of walking and cycling and purpose of trips





Based on the responses from the survey, 400 people (59%) stated that they currently cycle within the district compared to 282 (41%) who stated that they did not. 441 people (66%) stated that walking was their primary means of travel, while 244 (36%) stated that it was not. The primary reason for walking and cycling was for leisure and accessing amenities. Around 100 people stated that they cycle to work which shows that there is considerable scope to encourage more walking and cycling for commuting. This data could be considered further alongside the latest 2021 travel to work census data for North Hertfordshire (below).

Method used to travel to workplace	Census 2011	Census 2021	% change
Work mainly at or from home	4422	28689	+548%
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	221	113	- 48%
Train	7794	2442	- 68%
Bus, minibus or coach	1117	457	- 59%
Taxi	167	159	- 5%
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	400	211	- 47%
Driving a car or van	40153	27107	- 32%
Passenger in a car or van	2809	2061	- 26%
Bicycle	1240	875	- 29%
On foot	6364	4567	- 28%
Other method of travel to work	303	476	+57%

*Source: Travel to work, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

Overview of key comments

When ranked by number of responses the top 20 proposals/issues from the feedback are identified below.

	Areas/issues with highest number of comments
1	Safe walking cycling route from Ashwell to Ashwell & Morden Station
2	Interventions proposed for Knebworth High Street
3	A505 Crossing (A10 & A1198) (Royston)
4	General comments on approach (Knebworth)
5	Modal filter(s) on Gun Lane (Knebworth)*
6	Hitchin to Stevenage interurban route (inc. A1(M) J8 improvements)
7	Closing Lower King Street to traffic (Royston)
8	Modal filter on Pondcroft Road (Knebworth)
9	Cambridge Road Railway Underpass (Hitchin)
10	A602/Whitehill Road pedestrian crossing (Hitchin)
11	Vehicle speeds/traffic calming (Knebworth)
12	Bedford Road and Northern Hitchin connections (inc. Industrial Estate)
13	General comments on approach (Hitchin)
14	Queens Street/Mill Road proposals (Royston)
15	Cadwell Bridge Railway Underpass (Ickleford)

16	Knebworth to Stevenage (via Stevenage Road)
17	Parking on cycle lanes/ parking enforcement (Hitchin)
18	Safe cycle route between Baldock and Letchworth
19	Vehicle speeds/traffic calming (Baldock)
20	Vehicle speeds/traffic calming (Letchworth)

*It should be noted that a second modal filter was added on Gun Lane in error on the mapping

The proposals which received the most support were Ashwell – Ashwell & Morden Station walking/cycling route, A505 crossing in Royston, Hitchin to Stevenage Interurban route, the Cambridge Road underpass (Hitchin) and support for the crossing on the A602/Whitehill junction (Hitchin). The proposals which received the most opposition were the Knebworth High Street interventions, general opposition to all proposals in Knebworth, the modal filters placed on Gun Lane, closing Lower King Street in Royston and the modal filter placed on Pondcroft Road (Knebworth).

Further analysis has been conducted to identify the key issues by area.

Overview of key comments by area

Below is a brief overview of the key issues received by area based on the number of comments received within each area.

Knebworth

There was strong and well organised opposition by some of the residents and local businesses to most of the interventions proposed in Knebworth. There was more consensus around making improvements for walking than for cycling and some support for specific measures. Top issues highlighted include:

- Very strong opposition to the proposals for the London Road High Street; the removal of parking would significantly impact local businesses/trade.
- Strong opposition to modal filters on Gun Lane and Pondcroft – this would increase traffic on other roads
- Support for interurban proposal via Stevenage Road but concern around current condition of footway/roads and traffic speeds
- Acknowledgement that the route under the railway bridge is a key safety issue but mixed views on the proposals put forward
- Lack of routes to outlying towns and villages, such as Codicote, Welwyn, Oaklands, Woolmer Green etc.
- General opposition to the proposed approach

Hitchin

An engaged community that is generally supportive of the LCWIP proposals. A broad range of differing comments highlighting multiple issues (many of which were captured by the LCWIP) but some concern that some proposals could make traffic worse. Top issues highlighted include:

- Strong support for the interurban route to Little Wymondley and Stevenage, including improvements to the J8 interchange
- Cambridge Road rail bridge underpass highlighted as a key issue for pedestrians accessing Hitchin Station

- Parking and parking enforcement an issue in Hitchin – vehicles parking on narrow pavements and cycle lanes (St Michael's Road mentioned more than once) making walking and cycling difficult and undermining the improvements/aspirations
- Multiple roads/junctions highlighted as being dangerous to navigate for pedestrians and cyclists; A602/Whitehill Road highlighted the most followed by Bedford Road, Redhill Road, Old Park Road, Fishponds Road, Nightingale Road, Oakfield Avenue, Grove Road, Stevenage Road and Woolgrove Road
- Better connections needed to industrial estate (particularly for HGVs passing through central Hitchin) and support for routes to North Hitchin/Ickleford areas
- Cadwell Bridge railway underpass highlighted as a key issue (Ickleford)

Letchworth

Generally supportive of the LCWIP and some improvements identified but less comments/feedback than from other areas. Top issues highlighted include:

- Traffic calming, footway improvements and crossing points supported in key areas, such as Pixmore Way, Baldock Road (A505) and Avenue One
- Prioritisation should be given to the Letchworth Greenway and green cycle routes/PRoW
- General comments about the poor quality of footways and lack of regular maintenance making walking and cycling difficult, particularly for those with disabilities
- Multiple suggestions for new crossings points (Icknield Way, Birds Hill, Rose Hill, Avenue One, B656, A505, Broadway and Norton Road)
- Support for interurban connections to Baldock and Hitchin
- Several comments highlighting the need to prioritise safe school routes
- Support for interurban connections to Baldock and Hitchin

Baldock

Low feedback numbers but generally supportive of the proposals and approach with some additional comments and concerns. Top issues highlighted include:

- More traffic calming needed in key residential areas and near schools (Royston Road, Bygrave Road, Weston Way, Clothall Road, High Street)
- North Road and the B656/A507 junction highlighted as dangerous for cyclists and in need of intervention to support access to the station
- HGVs using Baldock as a cut through an issue, particularly in areas with narrow footways, such as Royston Road
- Safe Baldock to Letchworth cycle route needed
- Not enough new cycle routes proposed given the scale of development coming forward in Baldock
- **Ashwell**: Comments almost exclusively in relation to the creation of a safe walking/cycling route from the village to the station

Royston

Broadly in favour of the proposals with very strong support for some of the measures but equally strong opposition/concern for others. Top issues highlighted by area include:

- Very strong support for the A10/A505 Melbourn Greenway link
- General opposition to the intervention proposed for the Lower King Street/High Street area – while some welcome increased pedestrianisation, most of the comments feel

it would make traffic worse, impact local businesses and increase issues on other nearby roads
- Strong desire to see better/safer cycle routes from Bassingbourn and Litlington into Royston. Providing a safe crossing across the A505 is a critical issue in Royston
- General concern about the proposals for Mill Road and Queens Road – not enough room to accommodate cyclists
- Would like to see proposals expand to the industrial area
- Mixed views of redevelopment of the A10 gyratory

Post consultation review

Following a review of the LCWIP comments, several site visits and workshops were conducted to investigate and discuss the feedback in more detail. This included:

- Workshop with one local district councillor, five local representatives (Neighbourhood Plan committee, parish council and local business), HCC & NHDC officers on 15 March.
- Guided cycle tour of Letchworth with three members of Letchworth Cyclists with NHDC officer on 21 April.
- HCC & NHDC officer tour of Hitchin on 14 April.
- HCC & NHDC officer tour of south-west Baldock, Ashwell to Ashwell & Morden station, and Royston on 19 April.
- HCC officers met with Hitchin MP, local councillor and residents in Hitchin on 10 March 2023
- HCC officer project validation site visit – Cadwell Bridge, Ickleford on 19 April 2023
- HCC officer project validation site visit – Ashwell/Ashwell Station on 21 April 2023
- HCC officer project validation site visit – A600 Lower Stondon (North Hitchin/Westmill to Henlow) on 19 December 2022

Further changes were also considered in light of some of the new and forthcoming developments which have progressed and become more defined since the initial LCWIP routes were formulated.

As a result of the site visits, workshops, development considerations and additional project validation work that has been undertaken within some of the routes within North Herts, some changes and amendments have been recommended for the final LCWIP document (see **summary of proposed changes** document).

Overview of LCWIP consultation activity

Consultation overview

This section of the report provides an overview of the public and member engagement delivered by HCC and North Herts Council for the LCWIP consultation. The respective HCC and NHDC officers and communications teams worked closely together to identify opportunities and coordinate our respective campaigns to ensure maximum impact.

HCC Engagement:

A summary of the key marketing activities from HCC included:

- **Direct mailouts:** issued to key stakeholders, which included local councillors, town, and parish councils, walking, and cycling groups, local businesses, and schools

- **A dedicated social media campaign, which included:**

    - Total posts: 26
    - Total impressions: 23,408
    - Total engagements: 183
    - Enquiries: 0

    (For context, the level of engagement was higher than the previous WGC LCWIP campaign and around the same as the posts issued for emergency works and winter service updates, which are generally some of the most popular posts with the public)

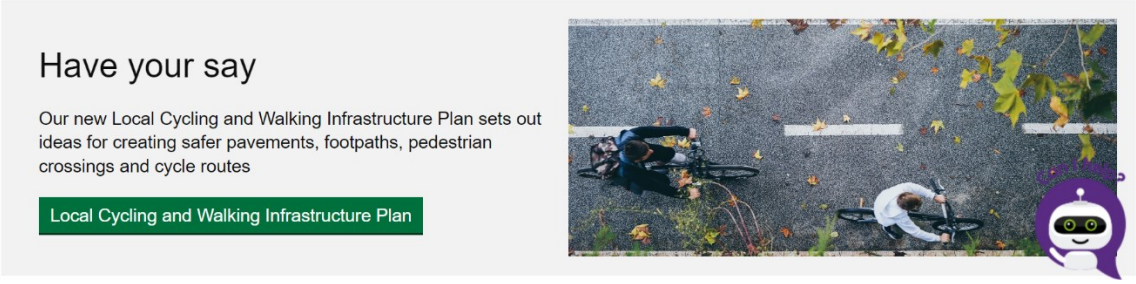
- **Press releases/ Highways Update Me bulletin:** The *'Have your say on North Hertfordshire walking and cycling routes'* story at the end of October was sent to 12,212 subscribers and viewed by 5,962 unique openers. There were 115 unique clicks on the *Have your say* button which signposted viewers to the consultation page

- **Website:** a dedicated North Herts LCWIP consultation website page was also set up. The page had 606 unique external page views in September 2022, 3,033 unique external page views in October 2022, and 934 unique external page views in November.

North Herts Engagement:

For North Herts, the consultation was promoted through:

- Dedicated page in the News section of the North Herts Council website: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/have-your-say-walking-and-cycling-routes
- Ad block on the home page:



- Twitter: 8 tweets plus mentions in relation to Town Talks and Community Surgeries
- Press release (which was picked up by the Royston Crow)
- Emailed the Citizens' Panel (approx. 600 people)
- Posted to the North Herts Council Intranet Message Board
- Coverage in internal staff magazine (Insight)
- Presentation at one of the monthly staff briefings on Zoom

North Herts in person engagement

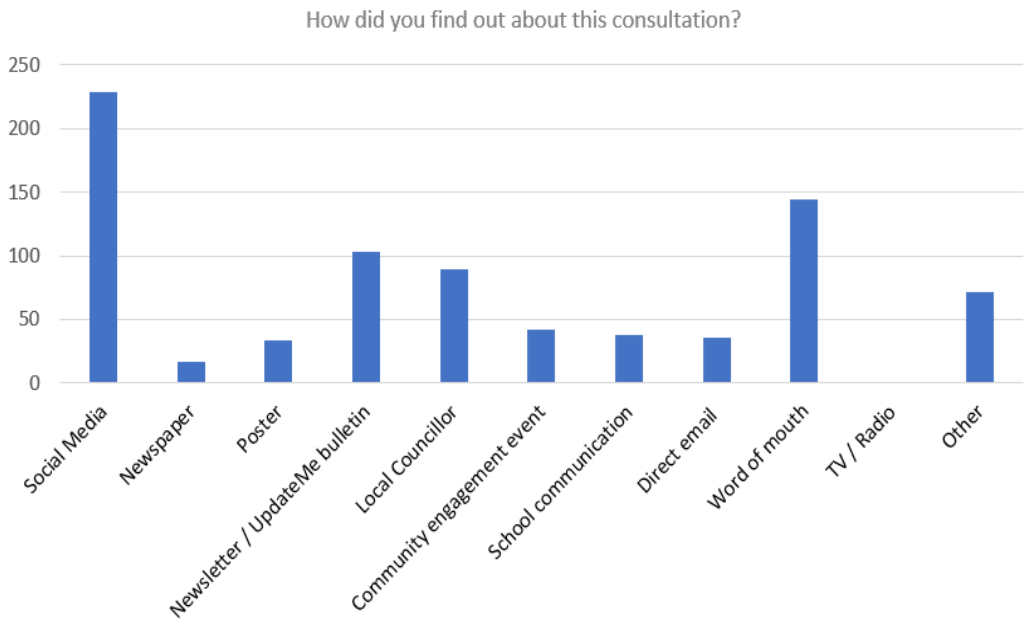
The following is a summary of all the public and member engagement conducted by North Herts, with approximate audience figures. This additional level of engagement was likely a key factor in increasing the overall consultation response rate through direct engagement and encouraging word of mouth (as can be seen from the earlier engagement graph).

Allowing for double counting, the estimated number of people engaged with was around 650, including all local councillors.

Date	Location	Organisation	Audience (estimate)	
			Size	Unique
21 Sep	Letchworth	Letchworth Committee	15	4
29 Sep	Letchworth	Southern Rural Committee	8	3
1 Oct	Hitchin	Hitchin Councillor Surgery	20	20
10 Oct	Email	Invitation to NHDC and North Herts HCC members, parish clerks and key stakeholders about Cabinet Panel on Transport	105	105
11 Oct	Hitchin	Hitchin Town Talk	40	40
11 Oct	Hitchin	Hitchin Committee	14	3
12 Oct	Royston	Royston Town Talk	15	15
12 Oct	Royston	Royston and District Committee	14	4
15 Oct	Letchworth	Letchworth Councillor Surgery	8	8
17 Oct	Royston	LCWIP drop-in	5	4
17 Oct	Royston	Royston Town Council General Purposes & Transport Committee	10	8
18 Oct	Email	Reminder to NHDC and North Herts HCC members and parish clerks about Cabinet Panel on Transport	92	0
18 Oct	Letchworth	NH50Plus	50	50
18 Oct	Zoom & YouTube	NHDC Cabinet Panel on Transport	70	40
20 Oct	Email	Reminder to NHDC and North Herts HCC members and parish clerks about LCWIP consultation	92	0
20 Oct	Knebworth	LCWIP drop-in	80	80
28 Oct	Royston	Meeting with councillors	2	0
31 Oct	Baldock	Baldock Town Talk	70	70
31 Oct	Baldock	Baldock and District Committee	12	4
2 Nov	Letchworth	LCWIP drop-in	4	4
2 Nov	Knebworth	Parish talk	130	100
3 Nov	Zoom	NHDC staff briefing	80	80
3 Nov	Baldock	LCWIP drop-in	15	12
		Total unique:		**654**

Impact of marketing campaign

The North Herts LCWIP consultation received a higher level of engagement and response rate than previous LCWIP consultations. An overview of the ways people found out about the consultation can be found below. Based on the responses, social media was the primary means of engagement, followed by word of mouth.



Consultation impact assessment

The response to the LCWIP consultation has provided a broad range of local knowledge and feedback that we have used to help improve the LCWIP policies and proposals.

From the 1239 responses received we have identified approx. **48 changes**, which includes modifications to specific routes and proposals, updates to the LCWIP mapping, the addition of new policies (such as equestrians), further information and clarify on key routes and general changes to improve the overall presentation of information and accessibility of the report.

The feedback has also helped to identify and prioritise future project validation work with detailed site sites being carried out at the Ashwell/Ashwell Station route and Cadwell Bridge underpass (and detailed options developed) as a result of the strong response from the consultation.

In additional to the changes identified to key routes and proposals, a series of broader learnings and insights have also been obtained from the feedback which can be used to inform future planning. The key insights included:

- **Safety**: Many comments highlighted safety concerns and risks associated with walking and cycling within their local areas. This included accident-prone locations, difficult or unsafe road crossings, and areas where residents felt there was inadequate infrastructure. We also received several comments highlighting risky behaviours of people driving and cycling that deter others from walking and cycling.
- **Accessibility**: Several comments were received from elderly residents and people with mobility impairments and disabilities, highlighting specific sites and general concerns within their local areas. These comments reinforced the importance of regular maintenance of footways and cycle tracks.
- **Connectivity**: Local insights into the connectivity of existing walking and cycling routes were provided which has helped identify gaps in the network or insufficient connections to key destinations such as schools, workplaces, parks, and public transportation.

- **Economic considerations**: Economic impacts of implementing walking and cycling infrastructure were highlighted, in particular the potential impact on local businesses, tourism, property values and transportation costs.
- **Usage and demand**: Information was obtained on usage of walking and cycling infrastructure, including footpaths, bike lanes, and shared spaces.
- **Health and well-being**: The consultation feedback provided information on people's walking and cycling habits, which has helped to provide some insights into the health and wellbeing and activity levels of people within the district.
- **Environmental impact**: General concerns about the environment were evident in the feedback. There was a strong consensus about the need to reduce traffic congestion, noise pollution, and improve the overall sustainability of the transportation system.
- **Implementation and funding**: The feedback will help HCC develop detailed implementation plans and support future funding applications through local support and buy-in for specific areas/proposals.
- **Stakeholder engagement**: While the LCWIP consultation received a large response, some groups were nevertheless under-represented, in particular people under the age of 30 (4.3% of respondents).
- **Future consultations**: Significant learnings have been obtained from the consultation process which can be applied to future consultations.

Delivery of the LCWIP will enable more people to access a wider range of education and job opportunities, and to lead a fulfilling social, active, and cultural life without needing to own a car. In the 2021 Census, 15.5% of households in North Herts did not have access to a car or van (8,781 out of 56,732 households).

Next steps

To review and agree the recommended changes and to the LCWIP document and appendices.

APPENDIX B

North Herts Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan

Partnership Project between

Hertfordshire County Council and North Herts Council

REPORT TITLE	North Herts LCWIP Changes Summary Report
REPORT AUTHOR	Dermot Dooher
REPORT CONTRIBUTOR	Edward Leigh
REPORT DATE	16 June 2023
REPORT VERSION	Version 2
REPORT STATUS	Final draft: Seeking approval for adoption by HCC Highways & Transport Cabinet Panel

North Herts LCWIP Changes Summary Report

This report contains a summary of the key areas of feedback following the North Herts LCWIP consultation period. The changes proposed to the document were primarily driven by where there was a consensus of opinion within each area to reflect the shared perspectives and priorities of the community, though equal consideration was also given to individual comments, such as ones that were representative of a group or community. Further changes have been identified through site visits (to areas identified in feedback), project validation work on new and existing routes, and where clear gaps, or the need for further clarity, has been identified through the feedback process.

The tables provide a high-level summary of the key issues/concerns highlighted by area and how these issues have been addressed (or not addressed) within the revised LCWIP. As part of these changes the maps and route summaries for each area will also be amended in the main LCWIP document.

The different colours are represented in the table as follows:

comments addressed/resolved
comments addressed/resolved in part
comments acknowledged but no changes made

Knebworth summary of changes:

Location/area	Key issue and summary of comments	How this has been addressed	Comments and rationale for any changes
London Road High Street	Very strong opposition to interventions proposed in the High Street area. Removal of parking would damage local businesses who are reliant on passing trade.	Resolved – cycling interventions removed from the High Street but new crossing point included at Northern end of the High Street to support walking and help regulate traffic	Measures removed as potential for Pondcroft Road to function as the key active travel route through central Knebworth (as an alternative to the High Street) Segregated cycling could also potentially be removed from London Road (between Gun Lane junction and High Street)
Station Approach (Railway underpass)	Intervention broadly opposed but with some support. Concern that signalisation of the junction will increase traffic and cause tailbacks.	Intervention retained but further detail included around the proposal – highlight in the summary that this intervention would be installed initially on a trial basis to gauge the impact	Despite opposition there was an acknowledgement in the feedback that this route is currently unfit for pedestrians.
Pondcroft Road	Interventions opposed on Pondcroft Road and Gun Lane as this would increase traffic on other roads.	Interventions revised on Pondcroft Road; reconfigure as a light controlled junction at the Station Road junction (synchronised with the Station Approach junction). Make exit only from Pondcroft Road for motor vehicles with a short advanced green phase for cyclists to enter Pondcroft Road.	Ambition for Pondcroft Road to function as the main active travel route through central Knebworth. Interventions that would restrict/impact motor vehicles removed from High Street and Gun Lane to support this.

Gun Lane	Interventions opposed on Pondcroft Road and Gun Lane as this would increase traffic on other roads.	Resolved – modal filters removed from Gun Lane	Options may potentially need to be considered for Gun Lane in conjunction with the Station Approach and Pondcroft Road signalisation
Stevenage Road	Support for a cycle route to Stevenage but strong concerns about the viability of using Stevenage Road due to traffic speeds and quality of roads/footways	No change to the route but further clarify could be provided to illustrate that measures to increase the attractiveness and safety of routes would be identified if the project were taken forward	Further validation work would be needed to identify suitable measures to make this route safe and more attractive for cycling.
Stevenage Road (Crossing point)	Mixed views on the location of the crossing point	No change but a note added to the mapping highlighting that the exact position is to be determined following further consultation	Potential crossing points include the exit from Peter's Way (if this becomes an active travel route) and the Oakfield's junction (to access the ROW which leads to Bragbury End, Stevenage)
Deards End Lane	While not included in the LCWIP, some comments supported closing Deards End Lane to motor traffic due to traffic speeds and rat-running	Comments investigated but no change to LCWIP	This would push traffic onto other roads and remove a key route for people on the West side of Knebworth. Upon further consultation this measure does not seem to be supported by the wider community.

Hitchin: Summary of key changes:

Location/area	Key issue and summary of comments	How this has been addressed	Comments and rationale for any changes
Charlton Road/Willows Lane	Willows Lane (leading into Charlton Road) used as a rat run – high speeds and difficult/dangerous for residents to cross safely near the junction	Resolved - new crossing point added to Charlton Road. Willows Lane/Charlton Road to be included in the broader LCWIP mapping as a secondary route	Willows Lane/Charlton Road currently sits outside the map in the main LCWIP document but will be included in the full-scale map in the appendices
A602 Stevenage Road /Blackhorse Lane junction	Crossing point needed opposite ROW at the A602/Blackhorse Lane junction – a widely used school route (Whitehill Jr School) which exits at a busy road	Resolved - new crossing point included in mapping (Hitchin to Stevenage Interurban Route) and ROW added to illustrate route	Strong support for the Whitehill Rd/A602 crossing already in LCWIP so crossings would need to be considered in more detail during feasibility/ validation stage.
Bedford Road / A600	Strong support for interventions along Bedford Road – aspirations to see this	Resolved - highlighted long-term aspiration to extend walking/cycling network along the A600 towards Henlow Camp	Project validation work undertaken by HCC to investigate the potential of this route

	extend to Ickleford towards Henlow		
Turnpike Lane junction / Ickleford	Support for improved connections to Ickleford and Henlow	Junction improvement added to the mapping at Turnpike Lane junction	Project validation work undertaken by HCC to investigate the potential of this route
Ransoms Park, Periwinkle Lane, Old Hale Way	In response to general support to see a cycle network implemented throughout Hitchin	Missing connections added to show the potential for a sustained cycle route from the Hitchin Station to the Westmill Estate	Project validation work undertaken by HCC to investigate the potential of this route
Lucas Lane	Highlight the opportunity to improve this route to support new developments to the West	Added note to the mapping highlighting the future significance of this route	Opportunity to make improvements to the existing ROW to accommodate new developments
Arlesey Road/Mill Estate	Not currently included in the LCWIP – opportunity identified during NHDC & HCC site visit	Include option to create a separate bi-directional cycle track and new bridge over the brook in the Mill Estate grounds	Suggested inclusion in LCWIP as could form part of planning permissions for any future redevelopment.
Old Charlton Road/Park Way underpass	Not currently included in the LCWIP A key route from the Charlton Road area which provides access under the busy A602	Include as a suggestion to remove barriers and allow cycling	Suggested inclusion in LCWIP following NHDC/HCC site visit to investigate feedback/comments
A602 - Little Wymondley	Strong support for this route but concerns of current cycling conditions along the A602.	Further options to be included in LCWIP and mapping: conversion of footpath parallel to Oakfield Avenue and North of A602 to create an off-road route, including a new bridge over Ippollitts Brookland.	Potential for an entirely off-road route on the North side of the A602 to Kingshott School and linking to upgraded shared path along Stevenage Road into Little Wymondley

Letchworth summary of changes:

Location/area	Key issue and summary of comments	How this has been addressed	Comments and rationale for any changes
Sollershott East, West and Highfield	Route/s highlighted by their omission from the LCWIP. This is a key route used by schoolchildren accessing Highfield School and potentially a better/safer route than the A505	Resolved – included in LCWIP mapping but further validation required Segregated cycleway extended slightly to Highfield School entrance	A site visit was conducted by a NHDC officer with the Letchworth Cyclists group to review this route in advance of its inclusion in the LCWIP.
Cromwell Road, Cromwell Green and Cashio Lane	General concern about the scale of development in the North of Letchworth and the need for walking cycling infrastructure to be in place to discourage excessive car use.	Cromwell Road, Cromwell Green and Cashio Lane suggested as an alternative to Workers Path (which is narrow and poorly surveilled). Included in LCWIP mapping but further validation required	A site visit was conducted by a NHDC officer with the Letchworth Cyclists group to review this route in advance of its inclusion in the LCWIP.

B656/A505	Lack of crossing points included along the B656 and A505	Resolved – additional crossing points added at key points (based on comments from LCWIP feedback), but precise locations will be determined following further research and consultation	Included on mapping nr the retail park (Avenue One) and Pixmore Avenue junction Letchworth following comments in feedback
Letchworth Greenway	Strong support to see the Letchworth Greenway improved and prioritised	Further detail on how the Greenway has been factored into proposals to be added to section 3.5.2 An additional suggestion added to mapping to re-route the Greenway at the B656 exit to existing PRoW. This would create a more direct off-road route that avoids a longer on-road route (via Weston Way (Baldock))	Existing ROW runs parallel to the A1(M) and Knights Templar School/Sports Centre and does not current allow cycling – illustrated as a suggestion on the revised mapping

Baldock summary of changes:

Location/area	Key issue and summary of comments	How this has been addressed	Comments and rationale for any changes
North Road	Interventions should extend beyond Bygrave Road considering forthcoming development	Resolved – route extended	
London Road	Safe crossing points needed along London Road	Comments acknowledged – crossing already included but a note added to illustrate that precise locations have not been finalised	
Baldock Lane	Highlighted by its omission from the LCWIP and LCWIP appendices	Resolved - to be included as a secondary route in the appendices	A potential opportunity to utilise Baldock Lane as an active travel route to Letchworth as currently does not experience heavy traffic
Whitehorse junction	Feedback highlighting this as a busy/dangerous junction for cyclists. Potentially discourages cycling to the station.	Junction improvement included in LCWIP but further detail to be added to summary highlighting that some of the issues in Baldock will be picked up during the BA1 master planning	
Royston Road/North Road/Clothall Road	Concern about HGVs passing through Baldock	As above – potential to improve this area through the new BA1 development Include Clothall Road as a non-audited primary route to support planned development to south-east	

Ashwell summary of changes:

Location/area	Key issue and summary of comments	How this has been addressed	Comments and rationale for any changes
Station Road	Very strong response highlighting the importance of creating a safe walking/cycling route from Ashwell Village to Ashwell and Morden Station	Resolved – included in the LCWIP as a primary route	Route validated following strong consultation response and options for improvements developed.

Royston summary of changes:

Location/area	Key issue and summary of comments	How this has been addressed	Comments and rationale for any changes
Lower King Street	Residents opposed to the proposal to close Lower King Street to motor-vehicles; many felt that this would increase traffic and rat-running on other parts of the network or were unclear on the impacts of the proposal.	Proposal scaled back to allow for more option testing and consultation.	Long term ambition to create a pedestrian zone in central Royston remains as a key objective but a clearer, more phased approach is likely to be needed.
A505/A1198 and A505/A10 junctions	Very strong support for a safe crossing across the A505 to improve access to outlying settlements, such as Melbourn and Kneesworth.	Resolved – A505 “Melbourn Greenway” crossing already included in plan. Further aspiration added for a crossing at the A505/A1198 roundabout (nr Tesco) to support active travel trips from Kneesworth and Bassingbourn.	Currently very limited access across the A505 from outlying settlements. A safe crossing point is a key issue for residents in Royston.
Queen Street and Mill Road	Concern over the viability of these roads being able to support cycling due to available space, traffic volumes and parked cars.	Comments acknowledged and resolved. Route diverted to Victoria Crescent, Morton Street and Green Street (lower traffic volumes and more road space) to avoid Mill Road.	This route was reviewed as part of the Royston Cycle Network project validation – Mill Road deemed less appropriate for cycling due to traffic speeds, high traffic flows, parked cars, narrow width and being an active bus route
Orchard Road / Access to the industrial estate	Several comments highlighted the lack of connectively to the industrial estate	Resolved – new proposed primary routes included along with a brief description of the measures	Routes validated as part of the Royston Cycle Network and Industrial Estate Connectivity North Herts GTP schemes (PR79 and PR104)
A10 Gyratory	Mixed response to this proposal – acknowledgement of the issue but concern interventions could make issues worse	Further detail around possible option testing could be included in the LCWIP summary	
Shrubbery Grove	Route should be extended to reach Shrubbery Grove development	Resolved – route extended	

Tannery Drift	Concern that the proposals for Lower King Street would push traffic onto Tannery Drift and that any proposed one-way system would exacerbate issues further.	No change as proposals scaled back for Lower Kind Street	Tannery Drift to be considered in conjunction with any future changes to Lower King Street

Additional changes following consultation feedback:

The following changes are additional amendments/additions proposed to the main LCWIP document and appendices following the consultation feedback.

Section in document	Issue/proposed change	Outcome	Comments and rationale for any changes
Maps and appendices	Accessibility of maps and information	Ensure all maps are updated in line with any changes. Provide a cover page and brief overview of the content of each appendix. Where possible overlay additional active travel routes.	
Map of schemes	Include a comprehensive map of all active travel schemes in North Herts, including all planned and in-progress interventions	This is something that is being developed digitally (HCC Scheme Database) that could potentially be made available to the public a live map of schemes	Providing a 'static' map of all active schemes would become quickly out of date
N/A	Feedback from equestrian groups highlighted the lack of acknowledgement in the LCWIP	Include an explicit policy on providing for equestrians. Where an intervention for cycling could also benefit equestrians, e.g., by enhancing or connecting existing bridleways, consideration should be given to including that as an objective	
N/A	Add further detail and clarity on the importance and future improvements along NCN12 as a key route from Old Knebworth – Stevenage – Letchworth	Further detail to be included in LCWIP – NCN12 provides an important interurban connection which was a key output from the feedback	NCN12 improvements identified in Gravely area and could be included in LCWIP Fully developed schemes already in place
N/A	Speeding is one of the main issues and barriers for cycling. Include information on the 20mph zones initiative	Include a section on the 20mph zone initiative and some of the schemes that have come forward, such as Bearton Road in Hitchin	20mph zones support walking and cycling and can negate the need for cycling infrastructure to be installed, so relevant to the overarching aims to the LCWIP.
Scheme ranking	Provide clarity on how safety was integrated into the scheme ranking/prioritisation	Further detail to be included highlighting that safety is considered as standard and would be considered in more detail through the safety auditing process for any scheme	

6.5 Other Prioritised Routes	Further detail is needed on the Ashwell and Morden rail station route	Update the text to reflect the project validation work that has been undertaken since the end of the LCWIP consultation	This is now a primary route which will be reflected in the LCWIP mapping and appendices
N/A	Include a section on the measures that would complement the LCWIP interventions (beyond changes to infrastructure), and what their status is in local policy and plans.	Include new section in LCWIP highlighting complimentary measures that would be considered as part of any further project validation process: maintenance; lighting upgrades; cycle parking; vehicles speeds and enforcement; cycle hire; and HGV weight limits.	This would help address many of the general comments and concerns from the LCWIP feedback
N/A	Reference to new development master planning should be included	Master planning to be referenced for areas such as Baldock, Knebworth, Letchworth and Hitchin in route summaries	The developments have the potential to address some of the concerns highlighted in the LCWIP feedback
N/A	Include further detail on the Hitchin – Stevenage interurban route, highlighting the need to create a safe cycling route from Little Wymondley into Stevenage and the route through the A1 interchange.	Further detail to be added to main LCWIP document and an action to develop a full proposal, including the A1 interchange.	Strong support this an interurban route in the LCWIP feedback. No current proposals for A1 interchange in place in NH or Stevenage LCWIP.
Throughout main report and appendices	Where possible, language should be simplified	Resolved	Where possible the wording should also be softened. E.g., people walking instead of pedestrians
N/A	Very little reference to E-bikes/scooters and mobility hubs	Add a section to reassure readers that these are featured in our thinking	This is an important area that will increase in interest before the next iteration of the LCWIP

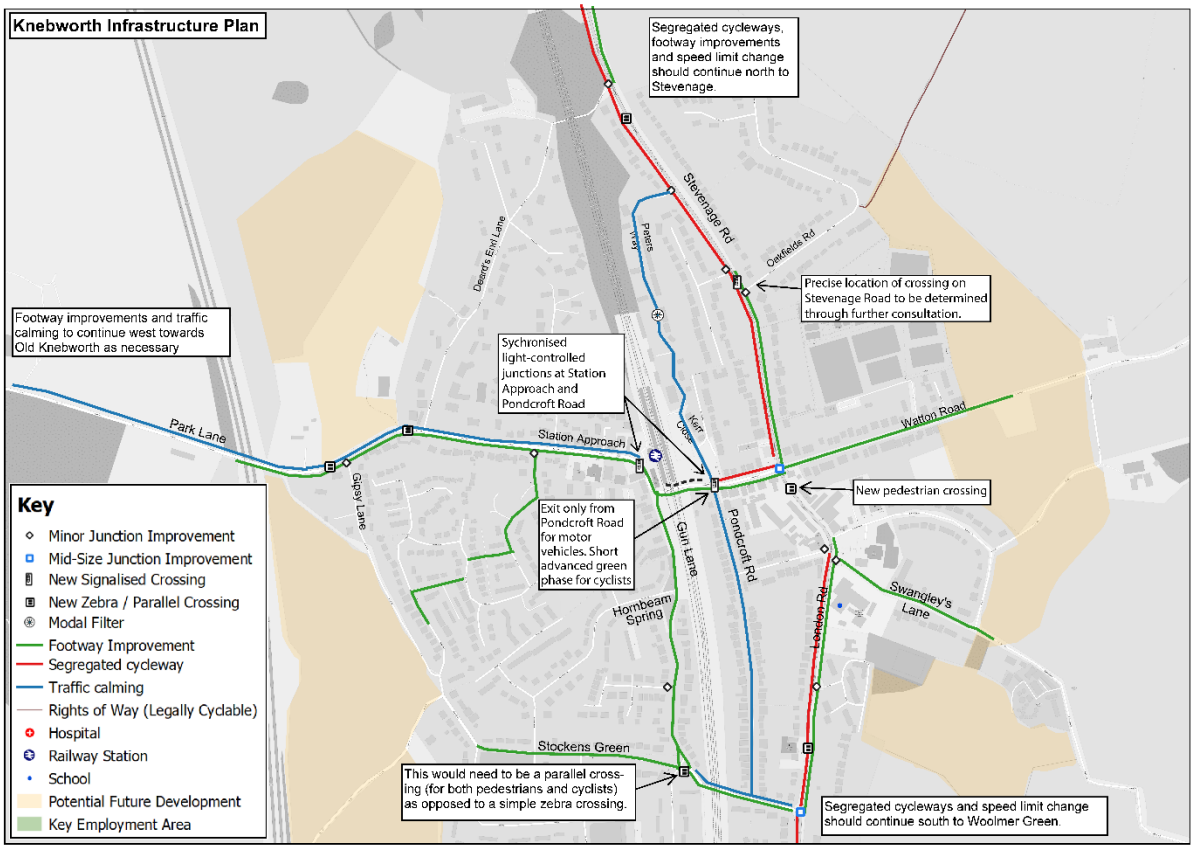
Revised infrastructure plans

Below are the updated infrastructure plans for each area to help illustrate the changes to the key primary routes in the main LCWIP document.

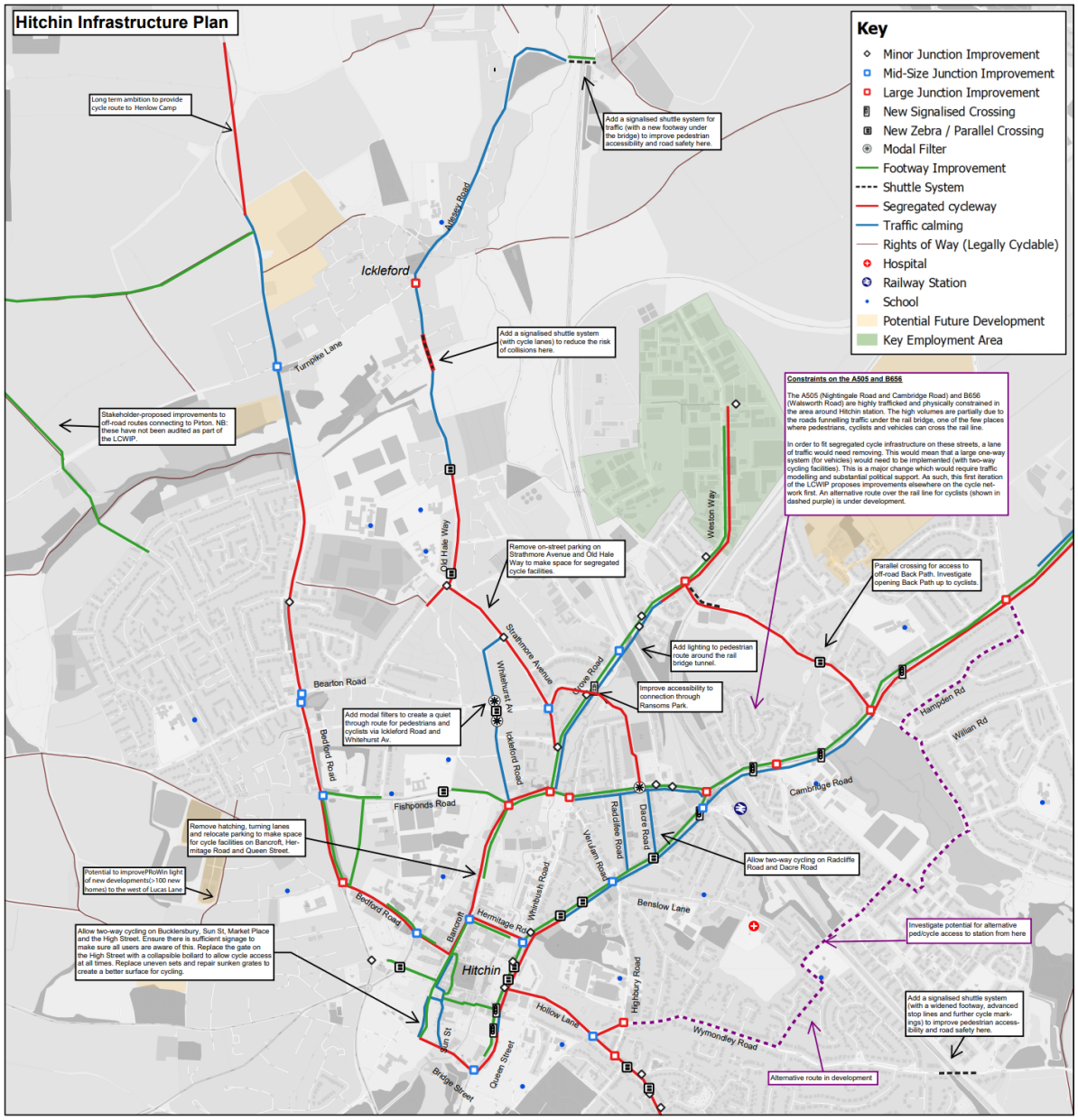
Further changes to the broader LCWIP mapping will be made as the reports are finalised to re-categorise the prioritised routes from the feedback (e.g., routes that may currently be secondary routes elevated to primary ones, such as the Ashwell > Ashwell & Morden Station) and integrate the maps to show:

- interventions
- audited priority routes
- unaudited primary routes
- unaudited secondary routes

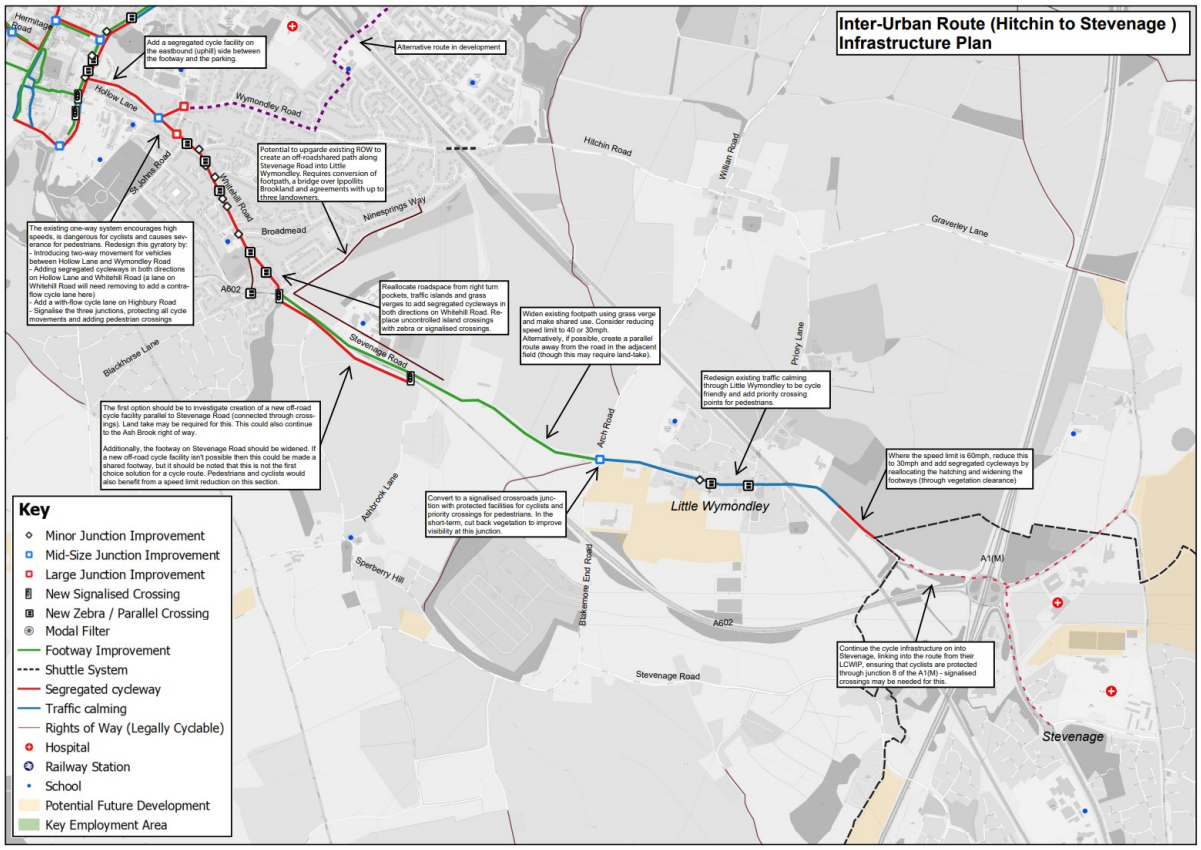
Knebworth



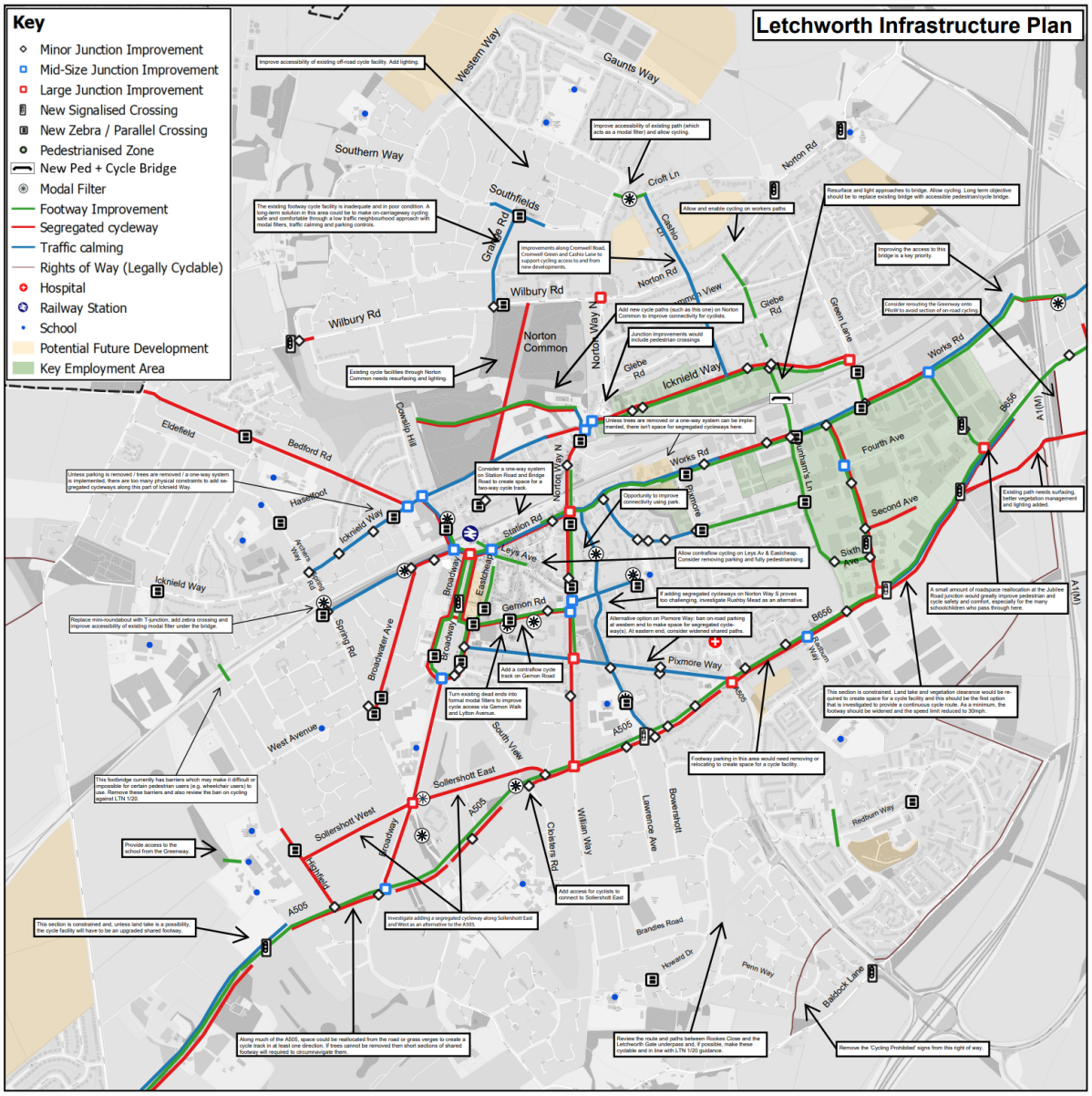
Hitchin


Hitchin Infrastructure Plan
Key
Minor Junction Improvement
Mid-Size Junction Improvement
Large Junction Improvement
New Signalised Crossing
New Zebra / Parallel Crossing
Modal Filter
Footway Improvement
Shuttle System
Segregated cycleway
Traffic calming
Rights of Way (Legally Cyclable)
Hospital
Railway Station
School
Potential Future Development
Key Employment Area
Long term ambition to provide cycle route to Henlow Camp
Add a signalised shuttle system for traffic (with a new footway under the bridge) to improve pedestrian accessibility and road safety here.
Ickleford
Add a signalised shuttle system (with cycle lanes) to reduce the risk of collisions here.
Turnpike Lane
Stakeholder-proposed improvements to off-road routes connecting to Pirton. NB: these have not been audited as part of the LCWIP.
Constraints on the A505 and B656
The A505 (Nightingale Road and Cambridge Road) and B656 (Walsworth Road) are highly trafficked and physically constrained in the area around Hitchin station. The high volumes are partially due to the roads funnelling traffic under the rail bridge, one of the few places where pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles can cross the rail line.
In order to fit segregated cycle infrastructure on these streets, a lane of traffic would need removing. This would mean that a large one-way system (for vehicles) would need to be implemented (with two-way cycling facilities). This is a major change which would require traffic modelling and substantial political support. As such, this first iteration of the LCWIP proposes improvements elsewhere on the cycle network first. An alternative route over the rail line for cyclists (shown in dashed purple) is under development.
Remove on-street parking on Strathmore Avenue and Old Hale Way to make space for segregated cycle facilities.
Old Hale Way
Weston Way
Parallel crossing for access to off-road Back Path. Investigate opening Back Path up to cyclists.
Strathmore Avenue
Add lighting to pedestrian route around the rail bridge tunnel.
Dacre Road
Improve accessibility to connection through Ransoms Park.
Bearton Road
Add modal filters to create a quiet through route for pedestrians and cyclists via Ickleford Road and Whitehurst Av.
Whitehurst Av
Ickleford Road
Bedford Road
Hampden Rd
Willian Rd
Fishponds Road
Cambridge Road
Remove hatching, turning lanes and relocate parking to make space for cycle facilities on Bancroft, Hermitage Road and Queen Street.
Radcliffe Road
Dacre Road
Allow two-way cycling on Radcliffe Road and Dacre Road
Potential to improve PRoW in light of new developments(>100 new homes) to the west of Lucas Lane
Verulam Road
Whinbush Road
Benslow Lane
Bedford Road
Bancroft
Hermitage Rd
Investigate potential for alternative ped/cycle access to station from here
Allow two-way cycling on Bucklersbury, Sun St, Market Place and the High Street. Ensure there is sufficient signage to make sure all users are aware of this. Replace the gate on the High Street with a collapsible bollard to allow cycle access at all times. Replace uneven sets and repair sunken grates to create a better surface for cycling.
Hitchin
Highbury Road
Hollow Lane
Add a signalised shuttle system (with a widened footway, advanced stop lines and further cycle markings) to improve pedestrian accessibility and road safety here.
Wymondley Road
Sun St
Queen Street
Bridge Street
Alternative route in development

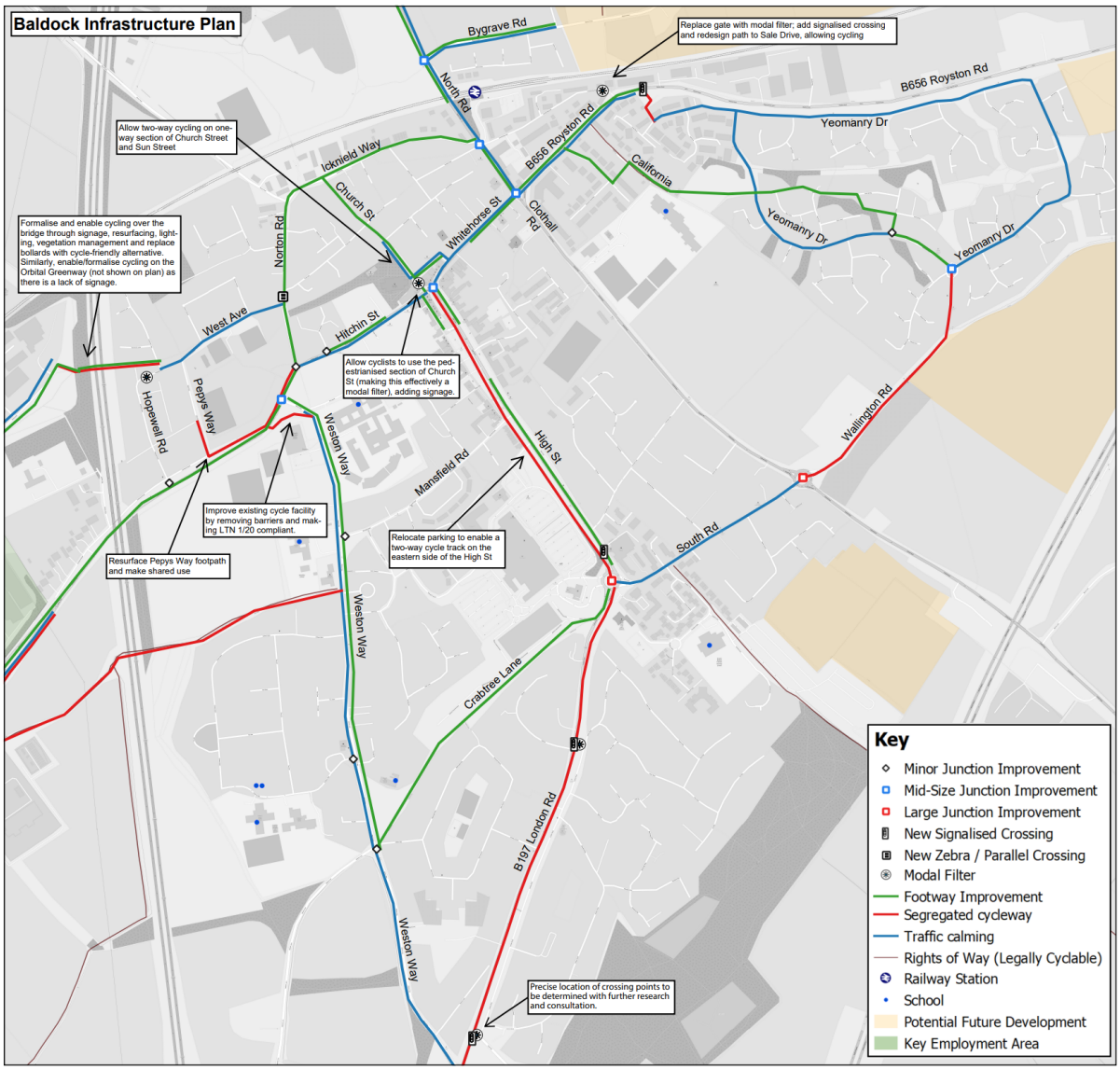
Hitchin Interurban



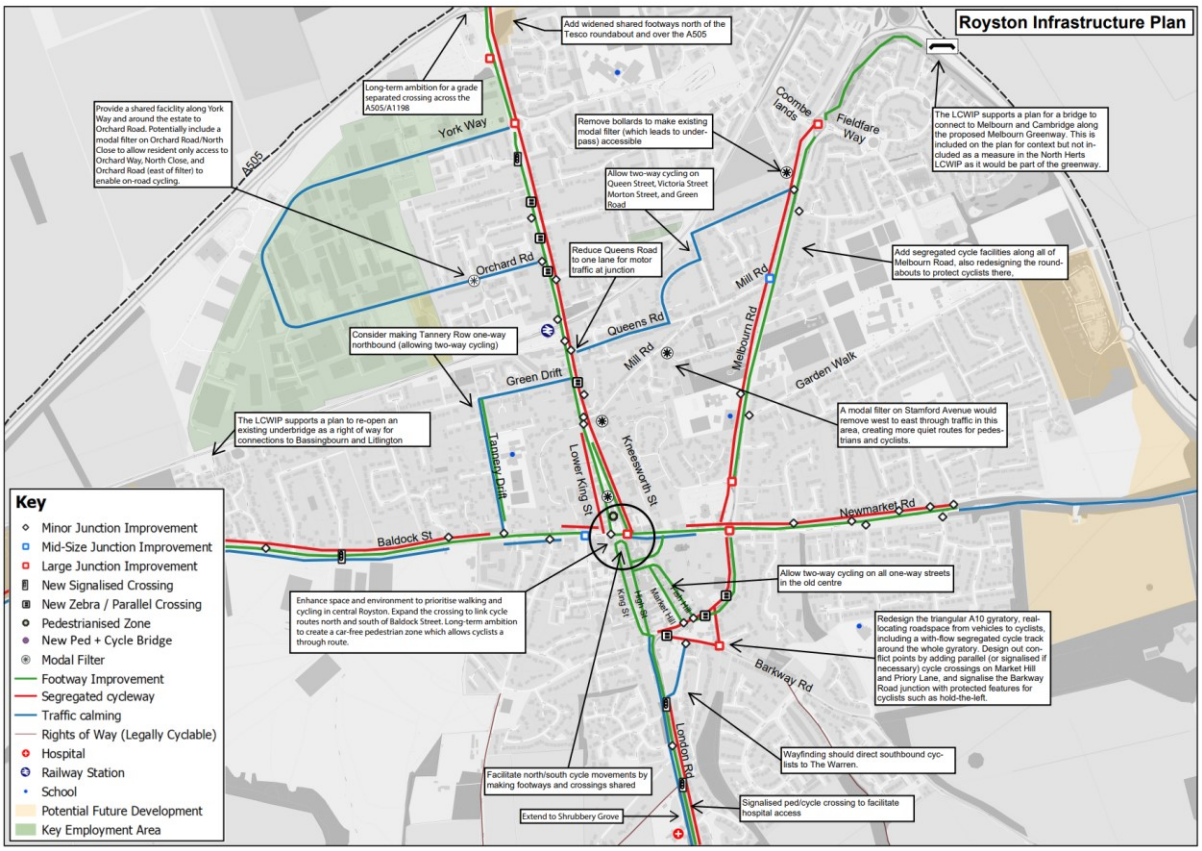
Letchworth


Letchworth Infrastructure Plan
Key
Minor Junction Improvement
Mid-Size Junction Improvement
Large Junction Improvement
New Signalised Crossing
New Zebra / Parallel Crossing
Pedestrianised Zone
New Ped + Cycle Bridge
Modal Filter
Footway Improvement
Segregated cycleway
Traffic calming
Rights of Way (Legally Cyclable)
Hospital
Railway Station
School
Potential Future Development
Key Employment Area
Western Way
Gaunts Way
Southern Way
Southfields
Croft Ln
Norton Rd
Wilbury Rd
Norton Common
Norton Way N
Glebe Rd
Icknield Way
Green Lane
Works Rd
Fourth Ave
Second Ave
Sixth Ave
Eldefield
Bedford Rd
Cowslip Hill
Station Rd
Leys Ave
Gernon Rd
Pixmore Way
Broadway
Eastcheap
Spring Rd
Broadwater Ave
West Avenue
South View
Sollershott East
Sollershott West
Highfield
Cloisters Rd
William Way
Lawrence Ave
Bowershott
Redburn Way
Brandies Road
Howard Dr
Penn Way
Baldock Lane
A505
B656
A1(M)

Baldock


Baldock Infrastructure Plan
Bygrave Rd
Replace gate with modal filter; add signalised crossing and redesign path to Sale Drive, allowing cycling
B656 Royston Rd
Yeomanry Dr
North Rd
Allow two-way cycling on one-way section of Church Street and Sun Street
Icknield Way
Church St
B656 Royston Rd
California
Whitehorse St
Clothall Rd
Yeomanry Dr
Yeomanry Dr
Formalise and enable cycling over the bridge through signage, resurfacing, lighting, vegetation management and replace bollards with cycle-friendly alternative. Similarly, enable/formalise cycling on the Orbital Greenway (not shown on plan) as there is a lack of signage.
Norton Rd
West Ave
Hitchin St
Allow cyclists to use the pedestrianised section of Church St (making this effectively a modal filter), adding signage.
Hopewell Rd
Pepys Way
Weston Way
Mansfield Rd
High St
Wallington Rd
Improve existing cycle facility by removing barriers and making LTN 1/20 compliant.
Relocate parking to enable a two-way cycle track on the eastern side of the High St
South Rd
Resurface Pepys Way footpath and make shared use
Weston Way
Crabtree Lane
B197 London Rd
Weston Way
Precise location of crossing points to be determined with further research and consultation.
Key
Minor Junction Improvement
Mid-Size Junction Improvement
Large Junction Improvement
New Signalised Crossing
New Zebra / Parallel Crossing
Modal Filter
Footway Improvement
Segregated cycleway
Traffic calming
Rights of Way (Legally Cyclable)
Railway Station
School
Potential Future Development
Key Employment Area

Royston


Royston Infrastructure Plan
Add widened shared footways north of the Tesco roundabout and over the A505
Long-term ambition for a grade separated crossing across the A505/A1198
Provide a shared facicility along York Way and around the estate to Orchard Road. Potentially include a modal filter on Orchard Road/North Close to allow resident only access to Orchard Way, North Close, and Orchard Road (east of filter) to enable on-road cycling.
York Way
A505
Remove bollards to make existing modal filter (which leads to under-pass) accessible
Coombe Yards
Fieldfare Way
The LCWIP supports a plan for a bridge to connect to Melbourn and Cambridge along the proposed Melbourn Greenway. This is included on the plan for context but not included as a measure in the North Herts LCWIP as it would be part of the greenway.
Allow two-way cycling on Queen Street, Victoria Street Morton Street, and Green Road
Reduce Queens Road to one lane for motor traffic at junction
Orchard Rd
Mill Rd
Add segregated cycle facilities along all of Melbourn Road, also redesigning the round-abouts to protect cyclists there.
Consider making Tannery Row one-way northbound (allowing two-way cycling)
Queens Rd
Mill Rd
Melbourn Rd
Green Drift
Garden Walk
A modal filter on Stamford Avenue would remove west to east through traffic in this area, creating more quiet routes for pedes-trians and cyclists.
The LCWIP supports a plan to re-open an existing underbridge as a right of way for connections to Bassingbourn and Litlington
Tannery Drift
Lower King St
Kneesworth St
Newmarket Rd
Baldock St
Allow two-way cycling on all one-way streets in the old centre
Enhance space and environment to prioritise walking and cycling in central Royston. Expand the crossing to link cycle routes north and south of Baldock Street. Long-term ambition to create a car-free pedestrian zone which allows cyclists a through route.
King St
High St
Market Hill
Redesign the triangular A10 gyratory, real-locating roadspace from vehicles to cyclists, including a with-flow segregated cycle track around the whole gyratory. Design out con-flict points by adding parallel (or signalised if necessary) cycle crossings on Market Hill and Priory Lane, and signalise the Barkway Road junction with protected features for cyclists such as hold-the-left.
Barkway Rd
London Rd
Wayfinding should direct southbound cyc-lists to The Warren.
Facilitate north/south cycle movements by making footways and crossings shared
Extend to Shrubbery Grove
Signalised ped/cycle crossing to facilitate hospital access
Key
Minor Junction Improvement
Mid-Size Junction Improvement
Large Junction Improvement
New Signalised Crossing
New Zebra / Parallel Crossing
Pedestrianised Zone
New Ped + Cycle Bridge
Modal Filter
Footway Improvement
Segregated cycleway
Traffic calming
Rights of Way (Legally Cyclable)
Hospital
Railway Station
School
Potential Future Development
Key Employment Area

Cabinet
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ACTIVE NORTH HERTS STRATEGY

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: ENVIRONMENT & LEISURE: CLLR STEVE JARVIS

COUNCIL PRIORITY: A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks Cabinet's approval to adopt the new Active North Herts Strategy, attached as Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet approve and adopt the Active North Herts Strategy attached as Appendix 1.

2.2 To recommend to Council that a budget of £50k be approved from 2025/26 onwards, to enable the delivery of a new Active Communities programme run by the leisure operator.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To ensure the Council and its stakeholder partners have a clear policy position on its approach to the future delivery of sport, leisure, physical activity and wellbeing services across the district.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. A public engagement exercise was undertaken via an online survey. The survey was live for three weeks in February 2023 and promoted through the Council's social media channels, press release and website.

5.2. The survey was designed to understand more about:

- current activity levels of North Herts residents
- the barriers to being active and what would help to overcome these
- what activities people would like to take part in
- how often they use Council sports, leisure and physical activity facilities and what would encourage increased use of these in the future
- what the Council's future priorities should be.

5.3. Key findings from the public engagement can be found in Appendix 1, page 25.

5.4. The Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy (SLC) facilitated an Active North Herts workshop with key Council officers, cross party Members and representatives from the Herts Sports Partnership and Stevenage Leisure Ltd (SLL) on 3 March 2023. The virtual workshop with key stakeholders was to review the findings of the consultation and to explore:

- the current challenges faced by the Council's leisure, sport and physical activity facilities and services and;
- the future opportunities to support a more active place
- to identify the key emerging strategic themes for the new Strategy

5.5. A second virtual workshop was help on 17 May 2023 to review the emerging Strategic themes.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 26 May 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. In March 2022, the Council appointed Consultants SLC to carry out a bespoke diagnostic review, based on Sport England's Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance, to support the Council's immediate strategic needs.

7.2. This included a review of available key strategic documents to understand the strategic context and ambition of the Council and identify the potential contribution sport, physical activity and wellbeing could make towards wider local strategic outcomes in North Herts.

7.3. The diagnostic work undertaken, supported by a strategic review of documentation and consultation exercise identified the following key workstreams;

- Sport and Physical Activity Strategy
- Leisure Investment Strategy
- Procurement Strategy

7.4. The Procurement Strategy was developed to support the leisure procurement project. However, the Leisure Investment Strategy was not progressed as Building and Mechanical and Electrical Surveys have recently been completed and therefore an investment plan will be produced based on the findings of the surveys.

7.5. The analysis identified that although the Council Plan makes reference to the Council's intentions for sport, leisure and physical activity, there is no overarching strategy that clearly sets out the Council's strategic approach, outcomes and objectives for sport and physical activity or its leisure services.

7.6. As a result of the review, a new Active North Herts Strategy has been developed which provides the Council and its stakeholder partners a clear policy position on its approach to the future delivery of sport, leisure, physical activity and wellbeing services across the district.

7.7. The key aims of the new Strategy include:

- Providing a clear policy position for the Council moving forwards

- Strengthening links with key internal and external strategic stakeholders in the district
- Identifying the resources required to oversee the Strategy
- Providing a policy steer to support the focus of future investment decisions
- Providing clear strategic outcomes and objectives to support the new leisure management contract
- Providing a framework of actions for the Council and its partners to deliver over the next 5 years.

7.8. The Active North Herts Strategy has been developed within a framework that includes a series of agreed Strategic Outcomes, Objectives and Enabling Actions:

- **Strategic Outcomes** – These describe the intended results and demonstrate the impact and success of the Active North Herts Strategy.
- **Strategic Objectives** – These describe the things that the Council and its partners are working to achieve that will contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.
- **Enabling Actions** – These describe the headline actions which will support delivery of the Strategic Objectives and subsequently contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.

7.9. The full Active North Herts Strategy Report is attached as Appendix 1.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The development of the new Strategy sits alongside the procurement of a new leisure management contract, which is currently underway. This provides a unique opportunity to rethink the design and delivery of the service. It sets out the role of the leisure operator partner in delivering a more outward facing service in support of the overarching Strategy.

8.2 A key focus of the strategy is in delivering an outreach programme to encourage inactive or less active residents to become more active. Our current leisure operator, SLL have recently appointed an active communities manager to enable more of this work to be carried out, funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund until March 2025. To ensure the outcomes of the strategy can be delivered, it is intended to provide an Active communities programme as part of the new leisure contact and therefore, Cabinet are asked to consider the budgetary implications of this at paragraph 10.3

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference 5.7.28 Cabinet can approve any strategy which is not reserved to Council and in circumstances where one does not exist. The Active North Herts Strategy falls within Cabinet's remit.

9.2. Supporting the Active North Herts Strategy neither imposes nor infers any specific legal implications.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The cost of producing the strategy was approximately £17k. A revenue budget of approximately £7k was allocated in 2022/23 alongside £10k grant funding which was awarded by Sport England.

10.2. In December 2022, grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was approved to employ an Active Communities Officer to increase participation and implement outreach programmes for key target groups. The post is employed by the leisure operator, currently SLL , and is grant funded until March 2025 . After this time, it is anticipated that the post will be fully funded by the leisure operator, under the new Leisure and Active Communities contract.

10.3. At paragraph 2.2. Cabinet are asked to recommend to Council to approve an ongoing revenue budget of £50k for the new Active Communities service, so that the Active communities service can be included in the new leisure contract. This is based on the continuation of an officer post (as detailed in p10.2 above). Contractors may choose a different delivery model but are required to cap their costs at a maximum of £50k. The new contract will include an option to enable the Council to withdraw the funding at year 5 of the contract, subject to review of anticipated outcomes and of budgetary constraints. The Council will look for external funding to off-set the cost of this service (e.g., Public Health or Government funding) but will need to set aside budget in case this is not forthcoming. It would not be reasonable to let a contract where an element was only delivered based on uncertain funding. Council approval is sought as there is not currently any funding available from April 2025 onwards, and therefore this would be outside the budgetary control framework. Whilst there is not a short-term need for the funding, there is an immediate need to specify what will be required from the new contract.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There is a risk that if the strategy is not adopted, the Council's strategic approach, outcomes and objectives for sport and physical activity and its leisure services will not be clear and will impact the new Leisure and Active Communities Contract.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 The Strategy has a key focus on the reduction of health inequalities and recognises that certain groups, including those who are disabled or have a long-term health condition, those from minority ethnic groups, and those on lower incomes are typically less active. Tackling these inequalities is a core theme of the Strategy. One of the key Strategic Outputs is Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities, while enabling actions include developing a diverse and inclusive programme of targeted activities that are co-designed with local people; supporting our partners to deliver physical activity opportunities particularly for those from less active groups; enhancing opportunities for active play through youth provision and digital tools; and working with our partners to develop and deliver activities that appeal to a wider audience. The Strategy will therefore contribute towards efforts to reduce health inequalities across the district. An Equality Impact Assessment has been conducted to highlight the groups that are most likely to be positively impacted.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report as this does not deal with a procurement exercise or contract.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. The strategy includes an enabling action, which recognises the environmental impact of the council’s leisure facilities. The relevant enabling action states: ‘Support the Council’s wider climate change strategy through effective environmental management of the Council’s leisure assets and by identifying ‘invest to save’ opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint.’

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The new Leisure and Active Communities Contract includes the provision of an Active Communities service to assist with the delivery of the Active North Herts strategy. However, there will also be resource implications for the North Herts leisure team and wider teams in delivering the strategy and this will need consideration during the action planning process.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 - Active North Herts Strategy Report - Final Draft Ver 1.0

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None.

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Active North Herts Strategy Report

North Herts Council

June 2023

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1. Active North Herts Strategy – Summary

1.1 Purpose of the new Strategy

1.1.1 North Herts Council is taking the opportunity to develop a new Active North Herts Strategy. This will set out a clear policy position on its role as a lead partner in enabling all residents to be more physically active.

1.1.2 Currently, the Council has no overarching strategy that clearly articulates its outcomes and objectives for the delivery of sport, leisure and physical activity services.

1.1.3 The Council has undertaken a wholesale review of its approach to delivering and supporting these services and a clear strategic direction has emerged.

1.1.4 The key aims of the Strategy include:

- Providing a clear policy position for the Council moving forwards
- Strengthening links with key internal and external strategic stakeholders in the district
- Identifying the client-side resources required to oversee the Strategy
- Providing a policy steer to support the focus of future investment decisions
- Providing clear strategic outcomes and objectives to support the new leisure management contract
- Providing a framework of actions for the Council and its partners to deliver over the next five years.

1.1.5 The new Strategy seeks to address existing health inequalities and target less active populations. It aims to create a supportive environment that inspires and enables individuals to move more and lead an active healthy lifestyle.

1.1.6 It will provide a 'clear line of sight' or 'golden thread' which connects the specific actions for sport and physical activity with the broader strategic priorities of the Council and its partners.

1.1.7 The development of the new Strategy sits alongside the procurement of a new leisure management contract which is currently underway. This provides a unique opportunity to rethink the design and delivery of the service. It will set out the role of the leisure operator partner in delivering a more outward facing service, in support of the overarching Strategy.

1.2 Strategic Framework

1.2.1 The Active North Herts Strategy has been developed within a framework that includes a series of agreed Strategic Outcomes, Objectives and Enabling Actions:

- **Strategic Outcomes** – These describe the intended results and demonstrate the impact and success of the Active North Herts Strategy.
- **Strategic Objectives** – These describe the things that the Council and its partners are working to achieve that will contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.
- **Enabling Actions** – These describe the headline actions which will support delivery of the Strategic Objectives and subsequently contribute to the Strategic Outcomes.

1.3 Summary Strategy on a page

1.3.1 The Active North Herts Strategy Summary can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Active North Herts Strategy Summary

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objectives
Strategic Theme: Active People	
1. **More North Herts residents moving more.**	Provide and support a connected and highly visible network of opportunities for residents to be physically active.
2. **Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities.**	Increase the number and frequency of people from identified target groups and localities taking part in regular physical activity.
Strategic Theme: Active Environments	
3. **High quality green and urban/grey spaces that support formal and informal opportunities to be active.**	Protect, maintain and enhance sustainable green and open spaces that provide opportunities for formal and informal outdoor sport, physical activity and wellbeing programmes.
4. **Safe connecting routes that support active travel and 'everyday activity'.**	Support the Council's wider strategic approach to sustainable active travel, through early intervention into the planning stages of new development.
Strategic Theme: Active Partnerships	
5. **A collaborative, 'whole system' approach to supporting local health and wellbeing.**	Strengthen the positive and preventative role of physical activity with system partners to deliver complementary, joined-up services.
6. **Skilled and enabled staff and volunteers supporting communities to be more active.**	Support the upskilling of the leisure operator's and other providers' workforce to ensure they are better able to meet the needs of people with more complex physical and mental health issues.
Strategic Theme: Active Places	
7. **High quality, inclusive and sustainable sport, leisure and physical activity facilities.**	Support the provision of sustainable indoor and outdoor facilities which are accessible to all and, meet evidenced need.
8. **Activated community places supporting an accessible, local physical activity offer.**	Increase locally based opportunities to be physically active through more community use of schools, community centres, village halls, sports club facilities, open spaces and informal space.

1.4 Guiding principles of the Strategy

1.4.1 There are a series of guiding principles and values which shall underpin the Council's approach to delivery of the Strategy:

- **Collaboration** - The Strategy provides a framework to optimise future partnership working across the Council itself and with its partners and communities
- **Needs-led and evidence-based** – The Strategy shall be driven by the needs of communities and directed by clear insight and evidence on what support is required and where
- **Responsive** – The Strategy shall flex in accordance with changing priorities and be prepared to adopt a 'test and learn' approach through effective monitoring and evaluation

1.5 Partnership philosophy

1.5.1 Any place-based strategy needs to be owned and delivered by the organisations and communities in their localities. It is agreed that a **partnership philosophy** will be applied to the Strategy based upon the principles set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Active North Herts Strategy – Partnership Principles

Partnership principles	North Herts will benefit more from partners working together to achieve our shared aims and objectives.
Diversity	The great diversity in our skills, knowledge and experience needs to be respected and we must work together to improve community cohesion and reduce inequality.
Respect	Respect is needed for the differing responsibilities and pressures faced by each partner.
Contribution	Partners will play an important role in the planning and delivery of the Strategy. Clear roles and responsibilities shall be agreed for each partner, as well as for any other statutory sector, voluntary and community sector organisation identified.
Consultation	Local stakeholders shall be involved in decisions affecting the services they receive. Co-design and co-production will be required through a 'bottom-up' approach.
Commitment	The Partnership Philosophy needs to be committed to, effectively resourced, and reviewed to ensure continuing effectiveness and impact.

1.6 Strategic Partners

1.6.1 The following strategic partners will be required to play a key role in supporting the future delivery of the new Active North Herts Strategy. Some have been involved in helping to shape the new Strategy through consultation and engagement:

- Herts Sports Partnership - Active Partnership
- Leisure operator partner – Stevenage Leisure limited

- Hertfordshire County Council – Public Health / Adult Services / Children and Young People Services / Transport
- The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Herts Disability Foundation
- National Governing Bodies of Sport
- Town and Parish Councils
- Community organisations
- Local sports clubs and physical activity providers
- Voluntary sector partners
- Local schools and colleges

1.7 Enabling actions

1.7.1 In Table 3 we set out the **enabling actions**. These are the headline actions which have been developed to support delivery of the Active North Herts Strategy.

1.7.2 These enabling actions will be developed further by the Council and its strategic partners over the next 12 months into a live, working action plan. The action plan will need to be agile and responsive, regularly reviewed and updated and be prepared to shift in direction as required.

1.7.3 Critical to this action plan will be a need to establish a clear understanding on the specific roles of the Council and its partners in leading or supporting each enabling action. Some indicative partners have been set out for the Council's consideration.

Table 3: Active North Herts Strategy: Enabling Actions

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active People		
1. More North Herts residents moving more.	1. Strengthen the work with partners and providers to develop, deliver and enable an innovative programme of formal and informal activities, supported by technology, that appeal to a wider audience. 2. Raise awareness of all residents of the opportunities to engage locally and the physical and mental health benefits of being more active.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts
2. Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities.	1. Develop insight into localities and groups where people are less active, to ensure resource is targeted where it is most needed and will have the most impact. 2. Work with partners to develop a diverse and inclusive programme of targeted activities that are co-designed with local people and delivered in accessible settings. 3. Leverage external funding to support targeted interventions and enable informal and informal participation. 4. Establish effective, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes, interventions and activity levels, to understand what works and to inform future design and delivery.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active Environments		
3. High quality green and urban/grey spaces that support formal and informal opportunities to be active.	1. Work with partners and providers to help 'activate' open spaces through development and co-production of a co-ordinated programme of outreach activities. 2. Enhance opportunities for active play through playgrounds and youth provision (such as skate parks/cycle parks) and by utilising digital tools. 3. Incorporate wider Council strategies and align with/feed into the Local Plan and updated Playing Pitch Strategy, due for publication in early 2024.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts
4. Safe connecting routes that support active travel and 'everyday activity'.	1. Raise awareness of active travel networks and a stronger understanding amongst residents of the benefits of 'everyday' activity. 2. Incorporate and promote the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan currently in development in partnership with Herts County Council. 3. Work with North Herts's leisure operator partner to establish Active Travel Plans for customers and staff at each of the facilities.	North Herts Council working with Hertfordshire CC, supported by its leisure operating partner

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active Partnerships		
5. A collaborative, 'whole system' approach to supporting local health and wellbeing.	1. Establish an Active North Herts Partnership Board to oversee the Strategy. 2. Build awareness amongst partners and providers, community workers and leaders, social prescribers and other community sign-posters of physical activity opportunities across North Herts – 'make every contact count'. 3. Support schools, sports clubs, town and parish councils, local businesses and community sector partners to deliver physical activity opportunities, particularly for people from less active groups. 4. Build capacity within neighbourhoods to support more active communities. 5. Develop a stronger role for the leisure operator partner, enabling the co-design of programmes and activities alongside communities and co-delivering these in local settings to build local capacity. 6. Establish stronger links with the local Integrated Care System.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including: • The Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB) • Active Herts - Active Partnership • Community organisations • The North Herts Voluntary Sector • Local schools and colleges
6. A skilled and enabled staff and volunteers supporting communities to be more active.	1. Support the development of apprenticeship programmes and work placements through stronger partnerships with local schools, colleges and training providers. 2. Support the voluntary sector to access grant funding, training and deployment opportunities.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including: • Local schools and colleges Community organisations • The North Herts Voluntary Sector • Training Providers • Leisure operator partner

Strategic Outcomes	Enabling actions	Lead organisation / Partners
Strategic Theme: Active Places		
7. High quality, inclusive and sustainable sport, leisure and physical activity facilities.	1. Maintain and enhance existing Council facilities through investment where there is evidenced need and a 'business case' for doing so. 2. Maximise the opportunities for developer contributions funding to support the facility infrastructure required, to meet the needs of a growing population. 3. Input into the Infrastructure Delivery Plan to ensure investment into facilities is proactively planned and align with other schemes. 4. Support the Council's wider climate change strategy through effective environmental management of the Council's leisure assets and by identifying 'invest to save' opportunities to reduce their carbon footprint. 5. Provide development pathways from beginners towards elite level performance. 6. Enable and support other facilities beyond the core leisure centres provided by partners wherever possible and where resources allow.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including: • Local sports clubs and NGBs • Local developer • Leisure operator partner.
8. Activated community places supporting an accessible, local physical activity offer.	1. Map the existing network of partners and providers delivering activities in community settings. Identify gaps in provision, utilising the open space and facility audits completed by the Council's Planning team. 2. Support these partners to develop and sustain community-based programmes at local facilities that are co-designed with local people.	North Herts Council working with system partners within North Herts including: • Local sports clubs and NGBs • Local developers • Leisure operator partner.

1.8 Monitoring and evaluation

1.8.1 In **Appendix 3** we set out some indicative Key Performance Indicators to measure progress of the Strategy. These will need to be reviewed and developed further by the Council in consultation with its strategic partners.

1.9 Our Approach

1.9.1 In order to inform the Active North Herts Strategy, SLC has completed a review of the current state of sport and physical activity within North Herts, which included the following:

- **Strategic document review** – to understand the wider strategic context in terms of the Council's future priorities
- **Demographic & health inequalities review** – to provide an insight into the key challenges in the District to be addressed through the Strategy
- **Review of the role of the leisure centres** – current state analysis on the use, reach and impact of the services

1.9.2 See **Appendix 1** for detailed analysis of the above.

1.9.3 **External stakeholder engagement** was undertaken to ensure the emerging Strategy was informed by the views and priorities of the community, sports clubs and schools.

1.9.4 This was supported by input from internal stakeholders to develop a realistic and achievable set of strategic outcomes and strategic objectives – the primary scope of SLC's work.

1.9.5 **Internal stakeholder engagement** consisted of two workshops with Council officers, elected Members and key strategic partners including Stevenage Leisure Limited and a representative from Herts Sports Partnership.

1.9.6 **External stakeholder engagement** consisted of online surveys published and promoted to the following groups:

- Existing leisure centre users and the wider public – **535 completed responses**
- Sports clubs – **25 completed responses**
- Schools – **14 completed responses**

1.9.7 See **Appendix 2** for detailed analysis of internal and external engagement.

1.9.8 This focused process has enabled the Council to review its provision of leisure, sport and physical activity services across North Herts, enabling it to revisit its priorities, to develop a new Active North Herts Strategy.

1.10 Acknowledgements

1.10.1 SLC would like to thank elected Members and officers of North Herts Council and strategic partners, including Herts Sports Partnership and Stevenage Leisure Ltd, for their input to date in developing the Active North Herts Strategy.

2. Next Steps

Eight key next steps to bring the Strategy to life in North Herts

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 SLC has worked with the Council and its partners to develop the strategic outcomes and objectives of the new Active North Herts Strategy and the enabling actions to support its delivery.

2.1.2 SLC has also set out some indicative key performance indicators to support the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy over the next five years. These can be seen in **Appendix 3.**

2.2 Next steps

2.2.1 Following adoption of the new Strategy, the Council needs to take forward the following eight key next steps:

1. **Develop a public facing Vision for Active North Herts and high level 'glossy' strategy, working with colleagues in the Communications team.**
2. **Establish an Active North Herts Partnership Forum, supporting terms of reference and governance structure(s) to support it and identifying members.**
3. **Identify sufficient internal resource to support and service the Active North Herts Partnership Forum and monitoring and evaluation to support it.**
4. **Embed the high-level strategic outcomes and objectives into procurement documentation to support the selection of a leisure operating partner.**
5. **Map the existing network of partners and providers delivering activities in community settings.**
6. **Following this, identify gaps in provision and priority localities, utilising insight from partners and the open space and facility audits completed by the Council's Planning team.**
7. **Develop the detailed action plan with partners, identifying key leads / owners and supporters / contributors linked to agreement on KPI's monitoring and evaluation.**
8. **Refinement and baselining of key performance indicators with strategic partners as appropriate.**

3. Active North Herts - An Overview

The general health of residents is above the national average.

Levels of active residents are higher than the national average. However, there are stubborn inequalities within North Herts.

Residents want inclusive, affordable, and sustainable opportunities for physical activity.

3.1 Where is North Herts now?

3.1.1 **Leisure, sport and physical activity services have an important role in addressing stubborn inequalities that are important to North Herts including:**

- overweight children
- activity levels amongst deprived areas
- those with a disability and long-term health condition.

3.1.2 Generally, North Herts has a higher proportion of active residents (those participating in 150 minutes or more of physical activity per week) than the national average.

3.1.3 **However, the more deprived a resident is, the less physically active they are.** Activity levels amongst the most deprived areas in North Herts (a third of residents) and those with a disability or long-term health condition, are significantly reduced.

3.1.4 The general health of residents is above the national average and levels of active residents are higher than the national average.

3.1.5 **However, there are deep set inequalities**. For example, childhood obesity is set to increase by c.10% from reception to Year 6.

3.1.6 **A better understanding is required of what is driving current physical activity levels and how any potential barriers could be lifted.**

3.1.7 Capturing localised data, especially around different socio-economic and ethnic groups will help inform a stronger understanding of specific community needs. This can support the design and delivery of the Council's future leisure and physical activity offer.

3.1.8 Full analysis, including a review of strategic documents, demographics and health inequalities and the role of leisure facilities can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 What do North Herts residents think about physical activity?

3.2.1 Key themes that emerged from the community engagement revolve around a need to create **inclusive, affordable, and sustainable opportunities for physical activity**.

3.2.2 Key to this is building partnerships, leveraging existing resources, and addressing the specific needs of different communities and demographics.

3.2.3 There are key synergies across the groups consulted with: residents, sports clubs and schools. They include:

- **Lower cost activities** would support increased physical activity
- The Council should prioritise support more **locally based activities** (e.g. in parks, community centres, village halls etc.)
- Resources should be focused on **less active/inactive groups**

3.2.4 87% of respondents surveyed want to be physically active.

3.2.5 Residents would be more active in the future if there were:

- lower cost activities
- more information on what's available
- a wider, more diverse range of activities
- better quality facilities

3.2.6 Sports Clubs identified the following support is required to help the needs of participants from less active groups:

- Increased funding opportunities to help meet the needs of less active groups
- Increased awareness amongst less active groups of clubs and activities available
- Additional training to provide more specialist coaches/instructors

3.2.7 Schools identified that the Council's priority for the provision of sport and physical activity facilities and services across North Herts should be:

- To **strengthen partnership working** with our leisure centres operator, sports clubs, schools, community and voluntary sector groups and other partners
- **To support more opportunities for residents to be active in local places** such as parks, community centres and village halls
- **To focus resources on encouraging inactive or less active residents to be more active**

3.2.8 Full details and results of the engagement with residents and stakeholders can be found in **Appendix 2**.

4. Appendix 1 – Active North Herts - Analysis

4.1 Strategic review summary

4.1.1 The Active North Herts Strategy will need to be framed within the wider strategic context.

4.1.2 The Strategy will need to complement and support the integrated framework of the Council's and partners' strategies, supporting improved health and wellbeing outcomes and increased community cohesion across North Herts.

4.1.3 SLC have reviewed a range of key strategic documents that will underpin the Active North Herts Strategy.

4.1.4 With no overarching strategy that clearly sets out the Council's strategic approach to its leisure, sport and physical activity services, it is important to consider where these services feature within the Council wider strategic priorities.

4.1.5 The Council's overarching strategy is the Council Plan 2022-2027, and although the promotion of physical activity is not explicitly mentioned, it does link into four key strategic themes which support the health and wellbeing of residents:

- **Our Environment** – recognising the importance of the natural environment and positive impact it has on the lives of local people
- **Our Local Economy** – highlighting the role of the regeneration of town centres and addressing the issues faced by rural communities
- **Our Places** – creating spaces and infrastructure that meet the current and future needs of residents
- **Our Services** – helping residents to access services more easily

4.1.6 Leisure, sport and physical activity services have an important role in supporting all of these key themes.

4.1.7 The Local Plan 2011-2031 also recognises the importance of community and recreation facilities, alongside greenspace, in contributing to local people's physical and mental wellbeing. The plan identifies key strategic priorities, including Healthy Communities. This states the priority to provide and maintain healthy, inclusive communities for residents.

4.1.8 The role of greenspace in leisure, sport and physical activity services is also recognised within the Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-2027. Although the two are not explicitly linked, the role of providing a wide range of greenspaces which can be used for recreational purposes is identified as a key objective.

4.1.9 There are also a number of wider strategies to consider such as the countywide Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which we understand is currently being updated. The Herts Sports Partnership's new 5-year Strategy outlines a Vision of "more people, more active, more often". The Strategy identifies a number of strategic objectives:

- **Community sport & physical activity sector** – provide opportunities for the people of Hertfordshire to start, continue and thrive in their chosen sport or physical activity
- **Covid recovery** - Support the community sport and physical activity sector and individuals to recover from the impact of the Covid pandemic, using sport and physical activity to improve health and wellbeing and community resilience.
- **Physical activity for health and wellbeing** - Positioning movement, sport, and physical activity at the heart of how we think about people's health and wellbeing in Hertfordshire.

- **Sport for social change** - Use sport and physical activity to enhance the lives of Hertfordshire's residents by supporting community cohesion, social inclusion, economic prosperity, crime and anti-social behaviour reduction, educational attainment and employability
- **Stronger communities** - Taking a place-based approach to tackling inequalities and reducing inactivity, by concentrating limited resources and empowering local communities from target areas, for maximum impact.
- **Active environments** - The development of inclusive and sustainable places and spaces to encourage participation in sport and physical activity for all our residents.

4.1.10 It will be critical for the new Active North Herts Strategy to connect and align strongly with the broader existing strategic context.

4.1.11 In summary, whilst the provision of spaces and places for sport, leisure and physical activity is evident within the Council's wider strategies, a clearer definition of its strategic role in supporting the health and wellbeing of communities is required.

4.2 Strategic review

4.2.1 The following documents have been reviewed:

- North Herts District Council - Council Plan 2022 – 2027
- North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031
- Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-2027
- The Herts Sport Partnership Strategy 2022-2027 'All Together Now – Uniting the Movement in Hertfordshire'
- North Hertfordshire Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan (including May 2019 update)
- North Hertfordshire Indoor Sports Facilities Assessment Report
- North Hertfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy & Action Plan (including May 2019 update)
- North Hertfordshire Playing Pitch Strategy Assessment Report
- North Herts Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-27

4.3 NHDC Council Plan 2022 – 2027

4.3.1 The Council Plan sets out three priorities:

- People first – valuing all residents, businesses, staff, contractors, Councillors and other partners and placing them at the heart of what the Council does
- Sustainability – committing to the delivery of services which are relevant and sustainable, with a focus on environmental responsibilities and sound financial planning
- A brighter future together – planning for the long term to ensure North Herts continues to thrive.

4.3.2 Whilst the promotion of health and physical activity is not explicitly mentioned within these priorities, they link into four subsequent themes which pick up on the health and wellbeing of residents:

- Our Environment
- Our Local Economy
- Our Places
- Our Services

4.3.3 Our Places contributes to this health and physical activity agenda through the ambition to create sustainable spaces and infrastructure based on need and ensuring walking and cycling are attractive modes of transport for residents. The developing Green Infrastructure Plan and Strategy will also support the health and wellbeing of residents.

4.3.4 The plan identifies key projects to deliver change that directly align to sport, physical activity and wellbeing:

- Installation of interactive playground equipment in all four towns
- Implementation of the new Green Space Management Strategy
- Undertake refurbishments at North Herts Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swimming Centre and Royston Leisure Centre

4.3.5 Although the strategy provides deliverable projects with associated timeframes for completion, there is a lack of proposed monitoring and accountability of these ambitions.

4.4 North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031

4.4.1 The Local Plan recognises the importance of community and recreation facilities, alongside greenspace in contributing to local people's physical and mental wellbeing.

4.4.2 The Plan makes reference to the increasing population and predicted growth of nearly 9,000 residents over the next 10 years.

4.4.3 There is a recognition that infrastructure will need to accommodate this growth, including community buildings and sports facilities to cater for an increased demand.

4.4.4 The plan identifies key strategic priorities, including Healthy Communities. This states the priority to provide and maintain healthy, inclusive communities for residents.

4.4.5 Key priorities to achieve this include:

- Support the retention of existing community, cultural, leisure or recreation facilities;
- Require appropriate levels of new community, cultural, leisure and built sport & recreation facilities to be provided in new development;
- Work with the NHS Trust, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and other relevant providers to ensure appropriate coverage of healthcare facilities across the District;
- Maintain the network of local retail centres identified in Policy SP4 and support the retention of locally-important shops;
- 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.
- Protect, enhance and create new physical and green infrastructure to foster healthy lifestyles

4.4.6 The National Planning Policy Framework 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.

4.5 Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-2027

4.5.1 The Greenspace Management Strategy sets out the Council's vision, aims and strategic objectives for the management of greenspaces.

4.5.2 The strategy outlines the following vision: "to provide high quality, well managed green spaces to meet the needs of our communities and which contribute positively to our sustainability priority".

4.5.3 The key objectives of the strategy are as follows:

- To manage our greenspace in an environmentally sustainable way, while also providing value for money for residents.
- To provide a wide range of greenspaces which can be used for many recreational purposes.
- To ensure greenspaces for future developments are developed with the needs of communities and sustainability in mind and deliver long term-benefits.

4.6 NHDC Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan (incl. Assessment Report)

4.6.1 The Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy & Action Plan was adopted by the Council in 2018, following the publication of the Assessment Report in 2016. This is important to consider when reviewing the key findings below as the strategy and action plans are somewhat out of date and require updating.

4.6.2 The overall vision for the strategy is 'to create a network of high quality, accessible and sustainable sport and leisure facilities, which offer inclusive services for all; enabling the inactive to become active and more residents to fulfil their potential by participating in sport and physical activity, thus improving their long-term health and well-being.'

4.6.3 Supporting this vision, the strategy's key objectives are based around the need to provide accessible and affordable facilities for all and contributing to tackling health inequalities across the region.

4.6.4 The additional need for facilities is considered in light of the housing and population growth identified in the Local Plan.

4.6.5 Key findings of the needs assessment undertaken as part of the strategy includes:

- There is a current and future under supply of sports halls and the current stock is in need of investment
- Clubs have identified demand for more sports hall space, suggesting there is a need for additional community provision
- There is generally a good supply of swimming pools, although the current stock is ageing
- Although the supply of swimming pools is good, clubs have identified a need for additional water space
- There is potential growth in demand for health and fitness facilities and consideration may be given to increasing the current provision
- Hitchin Swimming Centre and North Herts Leisure Centre are identified for investment

4.6.6 The updated Action Plan from May 2019 outlines key updates and outlines many refurbishments that have taken place, demonstrating the Council's track record of investing into its leisure, sport and physical activities facilities.

4.7 NHDC Playing Pitch Strategy & Action Plan (incl. Assessment Report)

4.7.1 The NHDC Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) & Action Plan, adopted in 2015, is based on the Assessment Report published in 2015. These findings are therefore out of date and there is a need to refresh the assessment report and required actions.

4.7.2 The PPS identifies that:

- Overall, there is spare capacity for adult, youth and junior grass football across the district
- There is a future need for further 3G provision
- There is currently sufficient provision for cricket, rugby union, tennis, bowls, golf and there is not a need for the provision of an athletics track
- There is a need for increased AGP provision to satisfy hockey demand

4.7.3 The May 2019 updated Action Plan provides key updates to facility and club usage.

4.8 North Herts Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022-2027

4.8.1 The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy sets out the role it plays in advancing equality, fostering good relations between different groups within the community, and helping those who are disadvantaged to feel heard, represented and given practical help and support.

4.8.2 The Strategy includes the following objectives for key groups within the community, each of whom share a protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act:

- Work with young people through youth engagement to make it easier for them to have their voices heard in local decision-making and democracy.
- Improve our engagement with marginalised, seldom heard, and new communities to make it easier for them to participate in local decision-making and democracy, and to have their views and experiences heard by the council.
  These groups may include but are not limited to:
  - Black and minority ethnic groups;
  - refugees and asylum seekers;
  - disabled people.
- Improve our understanding of broader EDI issues and their impacts, such as neurodiversity and economic disadvantage; as well as the intersections between inequalities, using our Inclusion Group as a channel.
- Achieve consistency in measuring the likely equality impacts of our emerging policies and services.

4.8.3 Levels of physical activity can vary significantly amongst particular groups. Those with a disability or long-term health condition, those from black and ethnic minority groups and those on low income are all typically less active. Tackling these inequalities will therefore need to form a central theme that runs throughout all elements of the new Active North Herts Strategy.

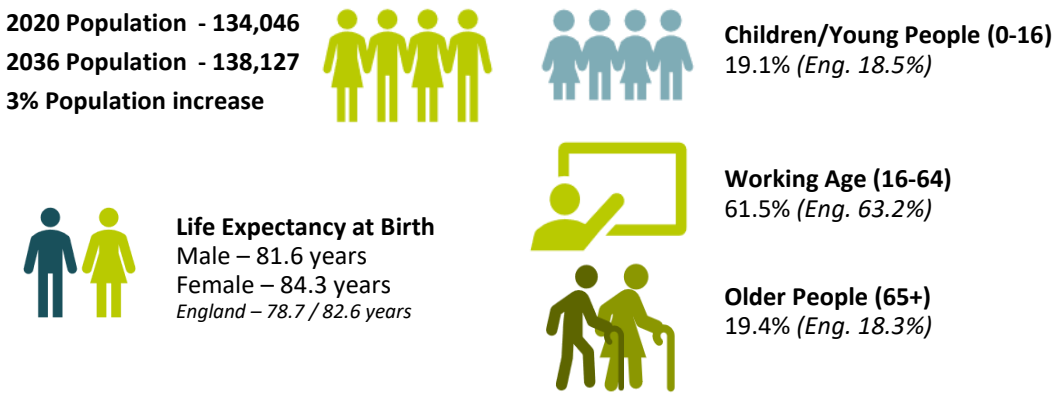
4.9 Demographic and health inequalities

4.9.1 A high-level review of the key demographics and health inequalities faced by North Herts residents has been completed. This provides an insight into the challenges in the District to be addressed through the new Strategy.

Key population and health statistics

4.9.2 Figure 1 provides an overview of the population, demographic, and life expectancy at birth across North Herts, and nationally.

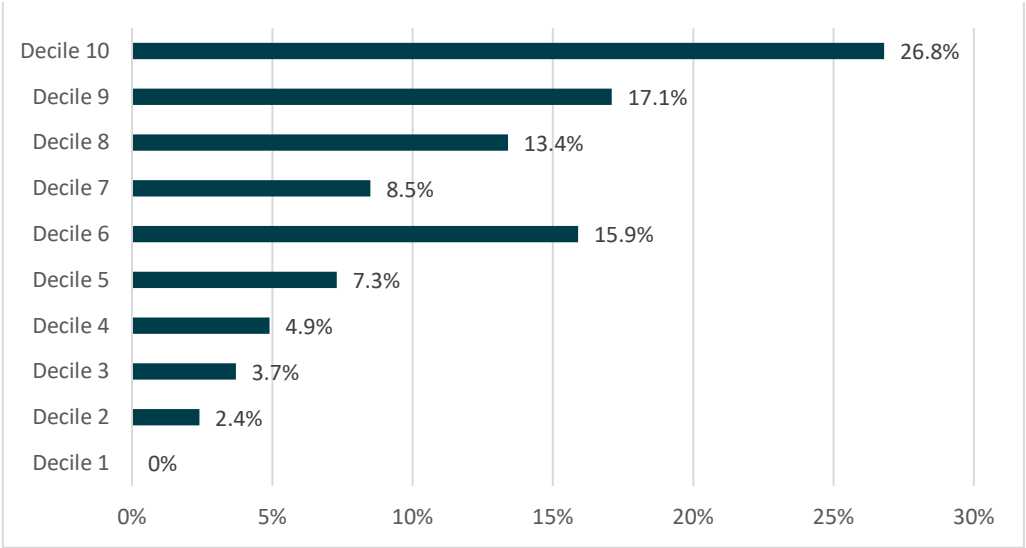
Figure 1: Population, life expectancy and demographics (Source: ONS)



4.9.3 North Herts is projected to increase by 3% by 2036 (Office for National Statistics (ONS) and life expectancy at birth is higher than the national average, both male and female. This population increase will be important to consider as built infrastructure will be required to meet a growing population.

4.9.4 Figure 2 shows the proportion of North Herts Lower-Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) National Deciles. IMD is the official measure of relative deprivation, taking into consideration elements that include Income Deprivation, Living Environment Deprivation, and Health Deprivation. Although North Herts is one of the 20% least deprived districts/unitary authorities in England, approximately 2,520 children live in low income families.

Figure 2: Proportion of North Herts LSOA in IMD National Deciles (1 - least deprived / 10 most deprived)



Population health

4.9.5 Overall, the health of people in North Herts is generally better than the national average. Figure 3 shows key health statistics for North Herts.

Figure 3: Overweight / Obese Children & Adults and Day-to-Day Activity Impairment due to Long Term Health/Disability (Public Health Outcomes Framework 2021/22)

Overweight or Obese Children
Reception – 17.8%
Year 6 – 28.36%
England – 22.25% / 37.76%

Overweight or Obese Adults
55.5% (April 2021)
England – 63.5

Long-term Health Problem or Disability
Day to Day Activities:
Limited a lot— 5.8%
Limited a little—10.1%
England – 7.5% / 10.2%

4.9.6 Obesity figures in North Herts across both adults and children are significantly lower than the national average. The Public Health Outcomes Framework 2019/20 states that 17.8% of reception age children in North Herts are overweight or obese, rising to 28% in Year 6. These are significantly lower than the England average, with reception figures c.9% lower than the national average. Similarly, adult obesity levels are c.8% lower than the national average.

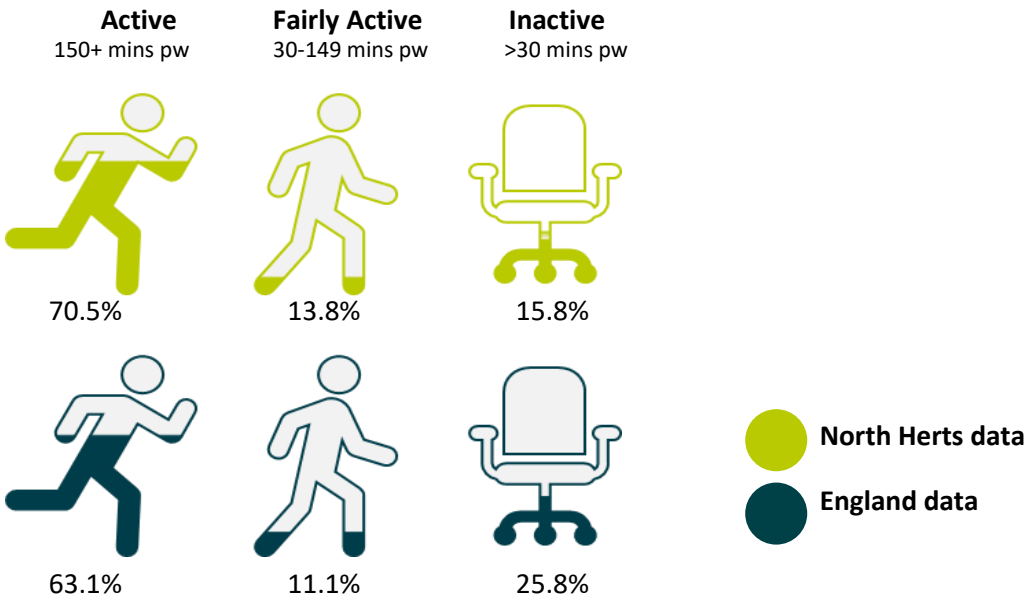
4.9.7 Similarly, North Herts residents that were identified as being disabled and limited a lot and limited a little are both lower than the national average. 10.1% of North Herts residents were identified as being disabled and limited a little, this equates to just over 1 in 10 people.

Key participation statistics

4.9.8 The Sport England Active Lives Survey November 2021/22 provides comparative activity data between North Herts and the national average. Generally, North Herts has a higher proportion of active (those participating in 150+ minutes per week of physical activity) residents than the national average (70.5% against 63.1% nationally).

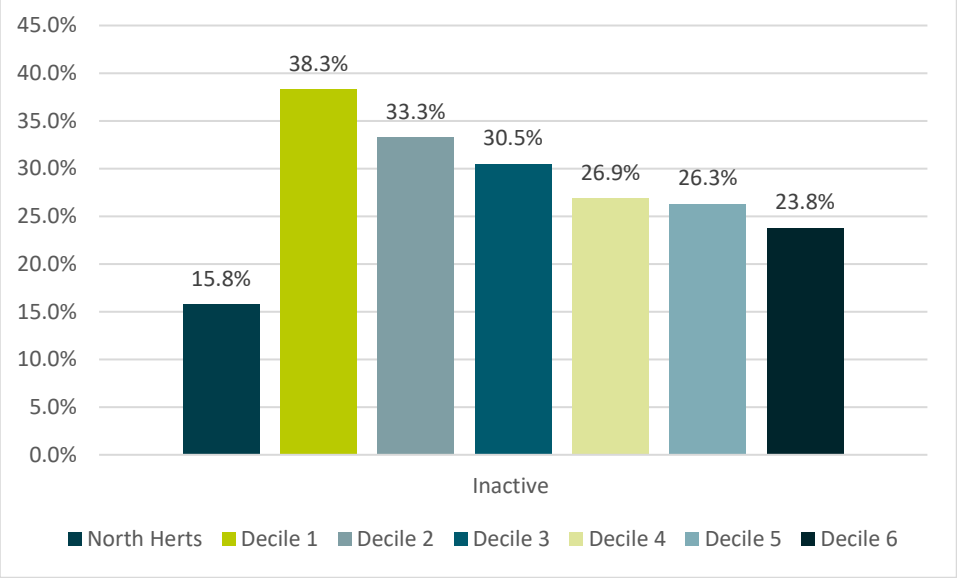
4.9.9 At 15.8%, North Herts also has significantly lower levels of inactive (those participating in less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week) residents than the national average (25.8%).

Figure 4: North Herts and National Activity Levels



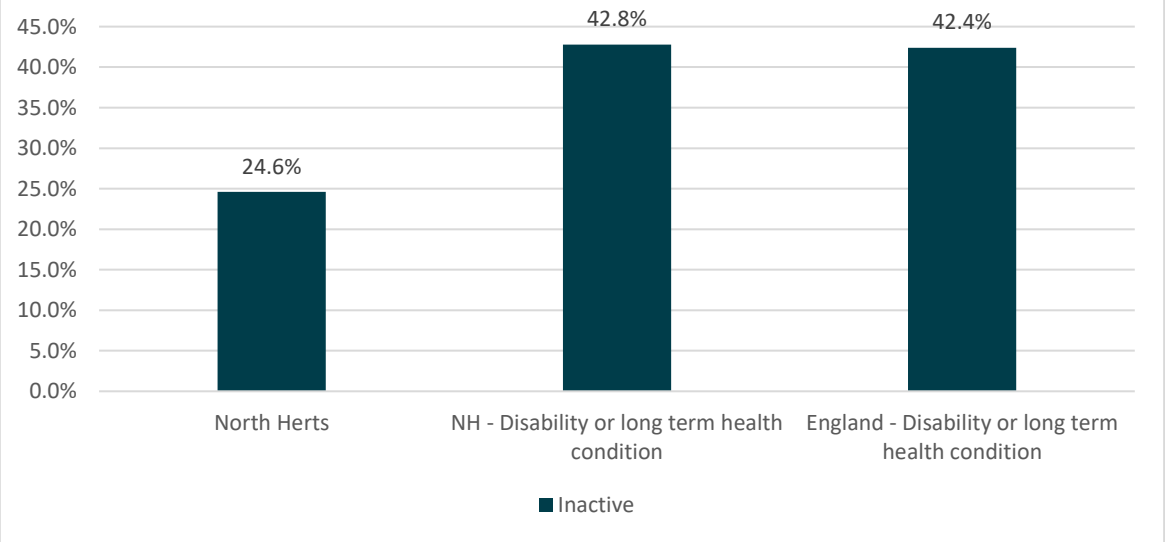
4.9.10 Figure 5 shows the inactivity levels of deprivation deciles (1-6), which are widely above the North Herts average. The first column represents the overall North Herts average inactivity levels, as demonstrated in Figure 4. The below graph shows the dramatic increase in inactivity in the most deprived areas of North Herts. **This identifies that the more deprived a resident is, the less physically active they are.** Significantly, Decile 6 inactivity levels are still higher than the average across North Herts. As shown in Figure 2, approximately a third of residents in North Herts current fall into deciles 1-6.

Figure 5: Inactivity by deprivation deciles



4.9.11 Figure 6 shows the inactivity levels of those with a disability or long-term health condition. This shows that inactivity increases significantly amongst those residents with a disability or long-term health condition when compared to the overall North Herts average. It also demonstrates that almost half of those with a disability or long-term health condition are physically active for less than 30 mins per week.

Figure 6: North Herts inactivity with a disability or long-term health condition



4.10 The role of the leisure facilities

4.10.1 The Council's leisure facilities play a crucial role in providing opportunities to be active and supporting the health and wellbeing of communities.

4.10.2 These facilities serve as publicly accessible and inclusive spaces where individuals of all ages and backgrounds can participate in a wide range of activities and programmes. They also play a vital role in providing learn-to-swim opportunities and supporting young people in developing essential water safety and swimming skills.

4.10.3 The facilities attract c. 1.4M visits each year and cater for a range of local sports clubs and community groups. As of January 2023, there were a total of 12,625 members across all facilities with c.1,330 on concessionary memberships, highlighting the Council's commitment to ensuring affordability and accessibility for residents. This high level of usage and membership reflects the significant reach and impact of the Council's leisure centres in supporting North Herts residents to be active.

4.10.4 The Council is in the process of procuring a new leisure contract to begin in April 2024. Within this, there are significant opportunities for the role of the leisure facilities service to expand its reach into communities and contribute even more to wider health and wellbeing outcomes. For example, the Council has a desire to establish a more outward facing service which provides more opportunities for people to be active in local settings.

4.10.5 The new contract will therefore act as a critical delivery mechanism for the new Active North Herts Strategy, providing more outreach programmes, with a focus on targeting less active communities. The preferred operator partner, selected through the procurement process, will therefore play a pivotal role in the future delivery of the Strategy.

5. Appendix 2 - What do North Herts residents and stakeholders think?

5.1 Public engagement

5.1.1 A public engagement exercise was undertaken via an online survey. The survey was live for three weeks in February 2023 and promoted through the Council's social media channels and website.

5.1.2 The survey was designed to understand more about the following:

- current activity levels of North Herts residents
- the barriers to being active and what would help to overcome these
- what activities people would like to take part in
- how often they use Council sports, leisure and physical activity facilities and what would encourage increased use of these in the future
- what the Council's future priorities should be.

5.1.3 Key findings from the public engagement were as follows:

- 535 responses were submitted
- **87% of respondents want to be more physically active**
- 14% of respondents are classified as 'inactive' (doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week)
- The three main barriers to being more physically active are: difficult to find the time (46%), it's too expensive (36%), and there is a lack of suitable activities (33%)
- The main things that would help participants become more physically active are lower cost activities (47%), improved walking and cycling routes (46%), more locally based facilities & activities (45%), and a broader range of activities (41%)
- Activities that people would like to participate in to increase levels of physical activity are walking (55%), swimming (47%), exercise classes (43%) and yoga/Pilates (40%)
- Respondents identified that the Council's priorities in supporting local people to become more active should be:
  - To support **more opportunities** for residents to be **active in local places** such as parks, community centres and village halls (48%)
  - To help **increase awareness** of what activities and facilities are available (42%)
  - To **focus resources** on encouraging **inactive or less active** residents to be more active (39%)
- The most popular responses when asked what would encourage people to use the Council's facilities more in the future were lower cost activities (49%), more information on what's available (40%), a wider range of activities (31%) and better quality facilities (24%).

5.2 Sports clubs engagement

5.2.1 A total of 25 sports clubs provided responses to the Council's online questionnaire. The key findings of the engagement are as follows:

- 44% reported that their club membership is slightly or significantly increasing. 37% reported that membership was remaining the same and 19% reported it was slightly decreasing
- 74% advised that they currently have some or a significant amount of additional capacity for new members, with the remaining 26% reporting that they have limited or no additional capacity for new members
- The main challenges highlighted by clubs in growing or sustaining membership levels are cost of facilities (48%), number of other volunteers to support club activities (48%), number of qualified coaches (40%) and access to facilities (36%)

Figure 7: Main challenges faced by clubs



- Clubs identified the following support is required to help the needs of participants from less active groups:
  - **Increased funding opportunities** to help meet the needs of less active groups (72%)
  - **Increased awareness amongst less active groups** of clubs and activities available (48%)
  - **Additional training** to provide more specialist coaches/instructors (32%)
- Sports clubs identified that the Council's priorities for the wider provision of sport and physical activity facilities and services across North Herts should be:
  - To help **increase awareness** of what activities and facilities are available (65%)
  - To **focus resources** on encouraging **inactive or less active** residents to be more active (61%)
  - To support the provision of **better-quality facilities** that are **more accessible** (57%)

5.3 Schools' engagement

5.3.1 14 schools provided responses to the online questionnaire. The key findings of the engagement are as follows:

- 60% of the schools who responded let out facilities for community use
- Key challenges identified for children and young people to be active in North Herts include:
  - Cost of activities (100%)
  - Access to facilities (77%)
  - Lack of information about what is available (54%)
  - Lack of time / motivation (38%)
- Schools identified that the Council's priorities for the provision of sport and physical activity facilities and services across North Herts should be:
  - To **strengthen partnership working** with our leisure centres operator, sports clubs, schools, community and voluntary sector groups and other partners (62%)
  - To **support more opportunities for residents to be active in local places** such as parks, community centres and village halls (54%)
  - To **focus resources on encouraging inactive or less active residents** to be more active (46%)

5.4 Internal and external stakeholders

5.4.1 SLC facilitated an Active North Herts Workshop with key Council officers, elected Members, Herts Sports Partnership and Stevenage Leisure Ltd on 3 March 2023. The virtual workshop with key stakeholders was to review the findings of the consultation and to explore:

- the current challenges faced by the Council's leisure, sport and physical activity facilities and services and;
- the future opportunities to support a more active place
- to identify the key emerging strategic themes for the new Strategy

5.4.2 The aim of the session was to identify the strengths within the current system and the opportunities for greater collaboration with partners. Alongside linking to the Council's internal capacity to provide leadership and coordination across the district.

5.4.3 The workshop secured strong engagement and genuine 'buy in' from elected Members and stakeholder partners. Attendees were consulted on what they considered to be the opportunities and priorities for the Council. The key themes that emerged were:

- Providing opportunities for physical activity that are affordable and inclusive
- Focusing on rural areas and addressing the needs of the needs of the community, and building 'everyday activity' into a healthy lifestyle
- Developing a much stronger community-based service, beyond the core facilities, through delivery of activities and programmes in community settings, parks and open spaces
- Coordinating and communicating available resources from partners, to establish a more placed-based approach
- Reducing levels of inactivity within communities, including removing the key barriers
- Strengthening collaboration with community and voluntary sector groups, to deliver programmes and activities within local settings that extend the offer and appeal to a broader audience
- Supporting the upskilling of the leisure workforce to ensure they are able to meet the needs of people with more complex physical and mental health challenges and cultural and socio-economic needs
- Developing an innovative and inclusive approach to workforce development through engagement with education partners. Providing a high-quality apprenticeship development programme and an innovative volunteering offer which recognises the value of the volunteering experience
- Developing a better understanding of the specific needs of communities and barriers to physical activity at a local level. A greater understanding of this will ensure services are designed effectively to meet these needs

5.4.4 Overall, the key themes revolve around creating inclusive, affordable, and sustainable opportunities for physical activity. Key to this is building partnerships, leveraging existing resources, and addressing the specific needs of different communities and demographics.

5.4.5 These key themes, alongside the key findings from the community engagement were used to establish the Strategic Outcomes and Objectives in consultation with Council officers.

6. Appendix 3 - Key Performance Indicators

Table 4: KPI's against Strategic Outcomes and Objectives

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active People				
1. **More North Herts residents moving more.**	Provide and support a connected and highly visible network of opportunities for residents to be physically active.	• Sport England Active Lives Survey	• Active Lives Survey Nov 21 - 22: Active: 70.5% Inactive: 15.8%	• Increase the number of Active residents by 5% • Decrease those categorised as Inactive by 5%
2. **Physical activity making a greater contribution to the reduction of health inequalities.**	Increase the number and frequency of people from identified target groups and localities taking part in regular physical activity.	• Sport England Active Lives Survey – specific groups (tbc) • Level of external funding to support targeted interventions	• Active Lives Survey Nov 21 - 22: Active: XX% (tbc depending on specific groups) Inactive: XX% (tbc depending on specific groups) • Level of funding to be established in year 1	• Increase the number of Active residents from specific groups by 5% • Decrease the number of Inactive residents from specific groups by 5% • 10% increase in programmes supported by external funding

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active Environments				
3. High quality green and urban/grey spaces that support formal and informal opportunities to be active.	Protect, maintain and enhance sustainable green and open spaces that provide opportunities for formal and informal outdoor sport, physical activity and wellbeing programmes.	• Residents' satisfaction on quality and accessibility of green and open space to support physical activity. • Moving More – number of programmes /activities taking place in open spaces	• To be established in year 1	• Improve satisfaction by 5% • Increase in number of programmes registered on Moving More by 10%
4. Safe connecting routes that support active travel and 'everyday activity'.	Support the Council's wider strategic approach to sustainable active travel, through early intervention into the planning stages of new development.	• % of planning applications where Active Design principles have been applied and resulted in a positive outcome. • Resident awareness on access to active travel options. • Delivery and monitoring of Active Travel Plan for leisure facilities	• To be established in year 1	• Increase of planning applications by 10%. • Increase resident awareness by 15% • Active travel plan targets (tbc)

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active Partnerships				
5. A collaborative, 'whole system' approach to supporting local health and wellbeing.	Strengthen the positive and preventative role of physical activity with system partners to deliver complementary, joined-up services.	• Number of programmes delivered through collaboration with system partners	• To be established in year 1	• Increase number of programmes by 25%
6. A skilled and enabled staff and volunteers supporting communities to be more active.	Support the upskilling of the leisure operator's and other providers' workforce to ensure they are better able to meet the needs of people with more complex physical and mental health issues.	• Number of endorsed training sessions on complex physical and mental health issues attended by the leisure operator's workforce	• To be established in year 1	• Increase number of training sessions by 25%

Strategic Outcomes	Strategic Objective	KPI (measure)	Baseline 2023	Target 2028
Strategic Theme: Active Places				
7. High quality, inclusive and sustainable sport, leisure and physical activity facilities.	Support the provision of sustainable indoor and outdoor facilities which are accessible to all and, meet evidenced need.	• Delivery of investment schemes at Royston LC • Delivery of NHC Capital Programme • Delivery of other investment schemes identified in partnership with operator • Energy consumption data. • Implementation of PV schemes. • Implementation of other invest to save schemes	• 2022/23 usage data • NHC Capital Programme • 2022/23 energy consumption data	• 10% increase in usage (2% per year) • Full delivery of Capital Programme • 10% reduction in consumption of energy from traditional sources
8. Activated community places supporting an accessible, local physical activity offer.	Increase locally based opportunities to be physically active through more community use of schools, community centres, village halls, sports club facilities, open spaces and informal spaces.	• No. of activities delivered in community settings that are registered on Moving More	• To be established in year 1	• 25% increase in the no. of activities delivered in community settings



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June 2023

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CABINET

27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS

REPORT OF: IAN FULLSTONE, SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR RUTH BROWN, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING & TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report identifies the latest position on key planning and transport issues affecting the District.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the report on strategic planning matters be noted.

2.2. That the officer responses and Project Board procedures attached as Appendices A to G are noted and endorsed by Cabinet.

2.3. That Cabinet approve the use of £85k of reserve funding to respond to the London Luton Airport planning application being considered by the Planning Inspectorate.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on strategic planning matters.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Executive Member and Deputy have been briefed on the relevant matters in this report. The Strategic Sites and Masterplanning Project Board met approximately monthly during 2022/23 to guide and monitor progress on major development sites proposed in the District. More information is contained in the report.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Members will be aware of, and familiar with, many of the issues surrounding the strategic planning matters referred to in paragraph 1.1 above. This report is intended to provide Members with the current positions on these matters. As with previous reports, only those matters where there has been substantive new information or change are reported upon.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Other Plans and Examinations

8.1. North Hertfordshire has eight neighbouring local authorities in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, and Hertfordshire. Officers monitor progress on the local plans for these and other relevant areas and, in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy, make representations at key stages.

- Stevenage - Local Plan Review commenced Autumn 2022
  - Station Gateway Area Action Plan, submission Spring 2023
- East Herts - Local Plan Review being considered but nothing formally actioned
- WelHat - Consultation on Main Mods Jan – Feb 2023
- St Albans - Local Plan Reg 18 Consultation planned for July 2023
  - Proposed adoption December 2025
- Luton - In the very early stages of Local Plan Review
- Central Beds - Intention to review Local Plan in early 2022, no further details available
- South Cambs - Greater Cambridgeshire draft joint Local Plan expected 2023
- Uttlesford - Consultation on draft Local Plan expected summer 2023

8.2. A number of authorities' plans are in early draft stages of consultation or review so there is only limited formal activity at present.

8.3. In addition to the immediately adjoining authorities, an officer response was submitted to Bedford Borough Council in 2022 requesting that their new Local Plan to 2040 allows for consideration of any further unmet needs from Luton that may arise from their upcoming Plan review identified above. Bedford voted to submit their Plan for examination in January

2023. It appears that Bedford Borough Council have not acknowledged their role in the wider functional housing area and do not take account of additional housing need arising from Luton.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan

8.4. The new Local Plan was adopted by Full Council on 8 November 2022. Work has already begun to assess the breadth of any Review that we should undertake in line with the commitments to undertake an early review of the Plan before the end of 2023.

Implementation – Supplementary Planning Documents

8.5. Following adoption of the Local Plan, focus has turned to its implementation. This includes preparing an appropriate set of supporting Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that were approved by Cabinet in March 2021.

8.6. The following targets for presenting versions of these documents to Cabinet have been agreed in consultation with the Executive Member and Deputy:

Document	***Consultation***	***Adoption***
Sustainability SPD	*September 2023*	*January 2024*
Biodiversity SPD	*November 2023*	*March 2024*
Design Code SPD	*January 2024*	*June 2024*

8.7. The Sustainability SPD was discussed at Cabinet Panel on the Environment on 22 February 2023 and the direction of travel for the document was considered and feedback from the Panel was incorporated into the document presentation to Cabinet on 14 March 2023.

Implementation - Strategic Sites & Masterplanning

8.8. The Strategic Planning Project Board continues to meet regularly. The current status of work on the six, largest Strategic Sites in the Local Plan is summarised below:

- Policy SP14: North of Baldock - Pre-application masterplan being prepared under a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA)[1] with initial public consultation carried out by Urban & Civic in March 2023;

[1] This work also includes the sites allocated in the Local Plan around Baldock to the south of the railway line known as BA2, BA3 and BA10.

- SP15: North of Letchworth – Pre-application masterplan being prepared under PPA. Baseline evidence stage largely complete and moving towards option development;

- SP16: North of Stevenage - Pre-application masterplan being prepared under PPA. The proposed draft masterplan was presented to the Project Board in May 2023 with public consultation expected to take place in June / July;

- SP17: Highover Farm, Hitchin – Masterplan prepared within the current planning application for the site and anticipated to be presented to Planning Control Committee in Summer 2023;

- SP18: North-east of Great Ashby – Pre-application masterplan being prepared under PPA. Currently at baseline evidence stage;

- SP19: East of Luton – Allocation-wide masterplan being prepared under PPA

8.9. Other masterplans for significant sites are being progressed through a variety of PPAs, pre-application discussions and current planning applications lodged with the Council (Masterplans in current applications | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)).

Implementation – Governance and oversight

8.10. The Strategic Planning Project Board provides Senior Manager and Councillor oversight of the activities above. Following the expansion of the Board's remit (reported to Cabinet in January) and adoption of the Local Plan, its Terms of Reference and all associated guidance have been reviewed and updated to refer to / reflect:

- The adopted Local Plan including the final, approved wording of Policy SP9;

- The renaming of the Strategic Planning Project Board and it's revised remit and structure; and

- 'Lessons learnt' from the practical application of Policy SP9 and associated procedures to date

8.11. These were reported to the Project Board and endorsed in March 2023. Certain elements were then reported as requiring further update in May 2023 to reflect changes to the Council Constitution and the outcomes of the elections.

8.12. The relevant documents are appended to this report, and it is requested these are endorsed by Cabinet, consistent with the approach taken to earlier iterations:

- Project Board Terms of Reference (Appendix A)

- North Hertfordshire Masterplanning Principles (Appendix B)

- Policy SP9 Approval Process (Appendix C)

- Design Review Protocol (Appendix D)

- Member Involvement Protocol (Appendix E)

Neighbourhood Plans

8.13. Ickleford Parish Council submitted (Regulation 16) their Neighbourhood Plan to the Council in March. Public consultation started on 11 May and continues until 27 June. The consultation documents are available to view on the website, statutory consultees and key stakeholders have been informed and the Parish Council have also publicised the consultation in the Parish. After the consultation period has been completed, the Council will work with the Parish Council to appoint an examiner. A response to the neighbourhood plan will be prepared and submitted as part of the consultation.

8.14. Consultation on a draft ('Regulation 14') neighbourhood plan for Wallington is currently taking place. The consultation period closed in February. Our response is appended in Appendix F.

Conservation Areas

8.15. The Council commissioned consultants to prepare conservation area appraisal and management plans (CAAMPs) for Ashwell and Pirton and to investigate whether a new conservation area should be designated at Chesfield. The final CAAMPs and proposed boundary changes for Ashwell and Pirton are the subject of separate reports.

8.16. As agreed by Cabinet in September 2022, public consultation has taken place on the draft CAAMP and the proposed conservation area at Chesfield. We received a number of responses to the consultation, mainly from local residents. All of the representations are available to view of the website. However, no responses were received from the key stakeholders, Historic England, Stevenage Borough Council, Graveley Parish Council, or the Hertfordshire Gardens Trust. Our consultants are undertaking further discussion with the key stakeholders and the outcome will be reported back to Cabinet.

Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB) and North-East-Central (NEC) Hertfordshire

8.17. The 'NEC' area covers the geographical areas of North Hertfordshire, Stevenage, East Hertfordshire, Welwyn Hatfield, and Broxbourne. The Local Planning Authorities, along with the County Council, are working together to explore potential long-term planning solutions.

8.18. Prior + Partners have been appointed to develop a Vision for the NEC area and we are working with them to engage with relevant stakeholders as to the direction of the Vision. Engagement includes work with Members and officers as well as identifying relevant community groups.

8.19. Aecom have produced a Stage 1 Baseline Data Assessment Report for the Growth Study.

8.20. Work is ongoing and further updates will be available in due course.

Government announcements

8.21. Consultation on proposed short-term revisions to national planning policy (the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)) alongside longer-term reform proposals being brought forward through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill closed in March 2023. A response was submitted with the approval of the Executive Member and is attached at Appendix G.

8.22. The consultation stated the Government's intention to publish an updated NPPF in Spring 2023. At the time of writing this has yet to be issued.

8.23. The Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Panel (HIPP), membership includes all Executive Members for Planning, submitted a response to a consultation on proposed increases to planning fees in April on behalf of the County Council and a number of District authorities including ourselves. The headline proposal was to increase planning fees by 35% for major applications and 25% for all other applications with this income ringfenced for planning purposes.

8.24. A number of further consultations have been undertaken. These include further detail on the Government's proposal for a mandatory Infrastructure Levy. At this stage, a key observation is the proposed timing for introduction with pilot authorities being sought to begin testing from 2025 but national roll-out potentially not occurring until 2030, well beyond the next General Election.

Other planning matters and documents

8.25. **Article 4 Directions – Town Centres** – The Council confirmed the immediate Article 4 Directions relating to the change of use of E Class to C3 (residential) in the District's Town Centres on 13 February 2023.

8.26. Following the confirmation, we were contacted by DLUHC requesting additional evidence regarding our decision for the geographical extent and intent of the Directions. This evidence has since been submitted to DLUHC and is under consideration. We have asked the Secretary of State to make some modifications to the Directions, namely, to remove all units currently in C3 (residential use) from the Directions. We await a response from them and will update in due course.

Other transport, planning and infrastructure matters

8.27. **Luton Airport S73 19mppa Application** – As previously reported, the Council commissioned consultants to prepare a response on behalf of the Council to the London Luton Airport S73 proposed planning conditions amendment to allow for an increase from 18 to 19 million passengers per annum. The application was called in by the Secretary of State (SoS) following a Public Inquiry that finished in November 2022. There has been no announcement on the outcome of the public inquiry at the time of writing this report. Any updates will be verbally reported at the meeting.

8.27. **Proposed expansion for London Luton Airport** – London Luton Airport Ltd, rebranded as Luton Rising (LR), submitted their application for a Development Consent Order (DCO) involving the expansion of Luton Airport from 18mppa to 32mppa (including a new terminal

and associated infrastructure) on 27 February 2023. The application was accepted by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) on 27 March 2023 (the project is defined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project given the proposed passenger numbers). Details can be seen on the PINS website at:
https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/eastern/london-luton-airport-expansion/

8.28. The next step includes the pre-examination stage whereby those who wish to participate in the examination can register with PINS by making a 'relevant representation'. This phase commenced on 9 May following the publication of a statutory public notice by LR and will run until 23 June 2023 (the statutory requirement is at least 28 days).

8.29. The submission of a 'relevant representation' enables a local authority's views to be considered by PINS when it carries out its initial assessment of principal issues in advance of the preparation of the examination timetable. The relevant representation is a statement of case and should include an outline of what a local authority agrees and/or disagrees with in the application, what they consider the main issues to be, and their impact.

8.30. Fuller details on matters raised are then provided through the submission of a Statement of Common Ground, a Local Impact Report and written representations to questions/issues raised by the Inspector as part of the examination process. Full details of the examination process and timescales for the submission of further papers required by PINs will be released following completion of the per-examination phase. Any updates will be verbally reported at the Cabinet meeting.

8.31. Given the high profile of the application and the Council's concerns regarding key issues such as surface access, air quality, noise and climate change impacts, North Herts along with the other host authorities (Herts County Council, Luton, and Central Beds) signed a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) with LR at the start of the process. The PPA has provided funding for the host authorities to engage consultants to review previous statutory consultation documents and submit comments on their behalf. The host authorities have renegotiated the PPA with LR to secure additional funding to engage consultants and legal advice/support for the examination process on joint matters. This does not preclude each local authority from submitting their own individual representations.

8.32. Given the limited staff resources and the demanding timetable that will be set by PINs through the examination process, North Herts, HCC and Dacorum BC have agreed to work together to appoint consultants to represent the Hertfordshire authorities on Hertfordshire specific issues through the examination process on matters that are not jointly agreed by the host authorities.

8.33 In January 2018 Cabinet noted that following a 20% government increase in planning fees, income was exceeding the then current budget by £137k and proposed that this be put into a reserve to provide the funding (e.g. additional officer resource, consultants) to be able to respond to and influence the plans, policies, strategies, and proposals that impacted upon the District. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the remaining £85k of this reserve is earmarked as North Herts contribution to the Hertfordshire specific work described above. HCC will be contributing a greater amount, Dacorum are unable to confirm any contribution at this time

8.34. **LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan)** – The timetable has slipped by one meeting cycle owing to a key officer being on extended sick leave, and a recognised need to conduct further engagement and site audits in light of feedback received during the consultation.

8.35. HCC and NHDC officers have held a workshop with Knebworth residents, received a guided tour by Letchworth Cyclists, and audited on-site additional routes in Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock, Royston and Ashwell.

8.36. HCC officers are now finalising the consultation report and revised LCWIP to present to NHDC Cabinet in June 2023.

8.37. The report and plan will then be taken through HCC's approval process, which is expected to end with the formal adoption of the North Herts LCWIP in September 2023.

8.38. **Sustainable Travel Towns (STT)** – As previously reported, the Officer Working Groups (OWGs) for the Letchworth and Royston STTs are meeting monthly to identify and progress key projects for inclusion in the implementation plans for each town. Meetings of the Joint Member Steering Groups for each town are being arranged to monitor progress and agree key stages in the development of the plans. Although a small amount of funding has been identified for delivery of these plans, substantially more funding will be required for the infrastructure elements of the plan including identifying suitable resources.

8.39. **HCC Place & Movement Planning and Design Guide** – HCC are consulting until 11 June on a new design guide to supersede *Roads in Hertfordshire – Highway Design Guide*, which was adopted in 2011. NHDC officers are working with the Hertfordshire Design Officer Network to arrange a presentation and workshop with planning departments to ensure that the final version of the guide is consistent with planning authorities' adopted and emerging Sustainable Design Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). NHDC officers are preparing a response.

8.40. **HCC Active Travel Strategy** – The HCC Highways & Transport Cabinet have approved a draft Active Travel Strategy for public consultation. This will supersede the current strategy, adopted in 2013. NHDC officers will prepare a response.

8.41. **Active Travel Fund Tranche 4** – HCC was awarded a further £4.6m by Active Travel England to deliver new walking and cycling schemes. In North Herts, some of this funding has been allocated to a recently completed scheme: a new crossing facility on Norton Road in Letchworth, close to the junction with Croft Lane. This was called for by local members and residents to improve safety for children walking to and from Norton St Nicholas primary school.

8.42. **Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)** – The government awarded £29.7m to HCC over two years to deliver its BSIP. £13.2m is for capital schemes. £16.5m is revenue funding.

8.43. For North Hertfordshire residents, the main benefit will be reduced fares:

- All multi-operator tickets (Intalink Explorer and BUSnet) will be reduced by 15%, making them comparable to single-operator day and season tickets. Expected launch: May 2023.
- The SaverCard Plus for 20–25-year-olds will be extended.
- A SaverCard will be introduced for 60–66-year-old Hertfordshire residents, giving a 50% discount on most bus fares. Expected launch: July 2023.
- A SaverCard will be introduced for 26–59-year-old Hertfordshire residents, giving them a 15% discount on most bus fares. Expected launch: July 2023.

8.44. Capital funding will be used to deliver bus priority schemes, including potentially in Hitchin (proposals are still being developed); to roll out Real Time Passenger Information displays at more bus stops; and to install new electronic information points in Hitchin (St Mary's Square), Letchworth (Broadway) and Baldock (Market Place).

8.45. Some BSIP funding will be used to market bus services and initiatives to widen awareness and increase patronage.

8.46. The HertsLynx demand-responsive service now operates 8pm to 11:30pm on Fridays and Saturdays. (Daytime operating hours are 7am to 7pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 4pm on Sundays.)

8.47. The Department for Transport has extended until October 2023 the subsidy to cap most single bus fares at £2 and will continue to subsidise a cap at £2.50 until October 2024. These caps apply to most scheduled services and HertsLynx. Note that Richmond Coaches, A2B and C G Myall, which between them operate all of the services in Royston, are *not* participating in this scheme.

8.48. **County-wide Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Strategy** – A final version of the strategy is expected to be presented to the Highways & Transport Cabinet Panel in September, and formally adopted shortly thereafter.

8.49. NHDC responded in December 2022 to the draft strategy published with the agenda for the HCC Highways & Transport Cabinet Panel meeting on 1 November 2022.

8.50. In the meantime, the government has provisionally awarded HCC £6.6m from the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund to roll out more chargepoints for use by residents. Although the market is delivering rapid chargers at destination locations, there is still a market failure in delivering fast chargers for use by residents who do not have off-street parking, and who need access to "fast" chargers to use overnight or for extended periods during the day.

8.51. NHDC has written a letter of support to the Department for Transport to help HCC secure its funding allocation, and to set out NHDC's plans. As required by NHDC's Climate Change Strategy, NHDC officers will be preparing an Action Plan that sets out the next steps beyond the current project to install and replace chargepoints in eight NHDC car parks (see next section).

8.52. **EV chargepoints in North Herts car parks** – Officers undertook a Further Competition tender in December 2022 using the KCS Procurement Services framework. The Tender closed in January, and officers are in the process of completing the contract documents and preparing the necessary car park lease agreements with the appointed supplier. An application has been submitted to the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) to seek 60% capital funding towards the installation of the EV chargepoints in the Council car parks. The appointed supplier will make up the difference.

8.53. The appointed supplier will assume full responsibility for the management and maintenance of the chargepoints and all associated infrastructure. It will retain all revenues, less a small share to the Council.

8.54. Officers are yet to hear if NHDC has been awarded the funding from OZEV. Any update will be reported verbally at the meeting. Once confirmation has been received, the chargepoints will need to be installed within this financial year to meet the grant requirements. As part of the commission, new and replacement chargepoints are to be installed in the following car parks:

- Letchworth (Hillshott CP and the Garden Square MSCP)
- Hitchin (Bancroft Recreation CP, Woodside CP and the Lairage MSCP)
- Baldock (Twitchell CP)
- Royston (The Warren CP and Town Hall/Civic Centre CP)

8.55. **Greater Cambridge Sustainable Travel Zone** – The proposal is for a large expansion in bus services in the Cambridge travel-to-work zone, funded by a 'Sustainable Travel Zone' charge on most vehicles being driven in Cambridge. The Greater Cambridge Partnership has published a report and responses to its 'Making Connections' consultation on the proposal (to which NHDC provided a detailed response in December 2022).

8.56. The Joint Assembly considered and debated the reports on 8 June, and made recommendations to the Executive Board for various adjustments to the proposal. The Board will meet on 29 June to decide what parameters to set for any further work on it.

8.57. **A505 Royston–Granta Park Study** – Cambridgeshire County Council has un-paused work on the A505 Royston-to-Granta Park Study. The consultants working on this, Stantec, are in the process of updating data and evidence since 2020, and will shortly be seeking input from district and county members in North Herts.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters, applications for, approval/designation, consultation/referendums revocations (or recommend revocation) of neighbourhood plans and orders, (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).

9.2. The preparation of statutory plans and supporting documents is guided by a range of acts and associated regulations including the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Localism Act 2011.

9.3. Under the Council's Constitution (14.6.10 (b) vii B) all functions relating to National Infrastructure Planning including co-ordination of the Council's response to any consultation, examination or other any other matter concerned with major infrastructure projects, is delegated to the Service Director Regulatory.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The general costs of preparing supplementary planning documents, responding to consultations on neighbouring authorities' Plans, neighbourhood plans and Government consultations and the other activities identified in this report are met through existing revenue budgets or benefit from external funding or other arrangements to recover costs.

10.2. The report refers to Planning Performance Agreements for Masterplans. Although these represent a relatively new process and income stream, they do not necessarily represent additional monies to the Council at this stage. Prior to the introduction of masterplanning requirements, the negotiation of significant planning applications would have taken place under the Council's charged pre-application advice service and / or through the planning application. This will continue to be the case in some instances. Planning application fees are set nationally. The Council sets local income targets for pre-application advice and planning applications to inform budgeting and budget monitoring.

10.3. Income from PPAs will, in the short term at least, reflect a displacement of potential income from the above. Officers are monitoring anticipated and actual PPA income and the relationship between PPA, pre-application and planning application income. This is reflected as required in budget monitoring and / or reporting on targets during 2023/24. PPA income may be used to offset any shortfalls in the other income streams.

10.4. The £85k contribution towards the Luton Airport examination will be funded from surplus income from the 20% planning fee increase that was transferred to a planning earmarked reserve in order to fund costs relating to responding to planning applications that could impact on the district.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. The Council changed how it sets and monitors risks during 2022. This has seen a shift to strategic risks based on key projects such as the Local Plan and masterplanning. At the time, it was concluded that it was best to revisit these risks following adoption of the Local Plan and expiration of the challenge period for any Judicial Review.

11.2. The relevant risks associated with the Local Plan will now be reviewed and updated with the Performance & Risk team. This will reflect the new approach to setting and monitoring Corporate Risks.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality issues arising from this report. Future individual schemes or considerations may well be subject to appropriate review to ensure they comply with latest equality legislative need. Any risks and opportunities identified will also be subject to assessment for impact on those that share a protected characteristic.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. A number of the schemes noted at section 8 will have considerable impact on the environment as they come to fruition. Many of these will be subject to their own statutory requirements for environmental assessment such as Sustainability Appraisal or Environmental Impact Assessment. The need for further assessment, for example where there is no statutory requirement, is considered on a case-by-case basis.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. The approved budget for 2022/23 included funding for a number of additional posts across the wider planning service. In recent months there has also been a turnover of staff, particularly in more senior professional positions. A number of vacancies were advertised and successfully filled during 2022. Recruitment exercises are currently ongoing for the remaining posts.

16. APPENDICES (to be added at final reports)

16.1. Appendix A – Project Board Terms of Reference

16.2. Appendix B – North Hertfordshire Masterplanning Principles

16.3. Appendix C – Policy SP9 Approval Process

16.4. Appendix D - Design Review Protocol

16.5. Appendix E - Member Involvement Protocol

16.6. Appendix F – Wallington Neighbourhood Plan Regulation 14 response

16.7. Appendix G – Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: Reforms to National Planning Policy response

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None

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North Hertfordshire Strategic Planning Project Board

Terms of Reference – Updated June 2023

Purpose of the Board

1 The purposes of the Strategic Planning Project Board ("the Board") are to support:

- The implementation of Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability in the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 ("the Local Plan") in relation to:
  - Strategic Housing Sites (Policies SP14 to SP19 of the Local Plan);
  - Local Housing Allocations (Policy HS1 of the Local Plan) that fall within the definition of significant development [generally taken to be schemes of 100 homes or more]; and
  - Any comparable, speculative proposals or planning applications for significant or strategic housing development on sites not allocated in the Local Plan;
- The wider implementation of the Local Plan including, but not limited to, the provisions of Policy IMR2 in relation to its proposed early review; and
- Co-ordination of planning policy and delivery with wider corporate strategy and the implementation of priorities and actions relating to climate change and sustainability (including biodiversity, waste and green space).

2 The Board will be advisory and established under normal internal meeting project management principles. The meetings of the Board are not public meetings, but in the interests of openness and transparency minutes will be taken and made available on request.

3 The Council will continue to exercise its statutory function as local planning authority through the existing decision-making routes and structures but with the added benefit of clear reporting and recommendations from the Board. The recommendations and/or views of the Board will be reported to the appropriate committee(s) either in writing or by the Chair.

Masterplanning

4 Policy SP9 of the adopted Local Plan states (inter alia):

> [The Council will] *require Strategic Masterplans to be produced for Strategic Housing Sites and significant development.*
>
> *[And] Encourage the submission of Strategic Masterplans for the Council's consideration and agreement before the submission of a planning application…Planning applications must be accompanied by a Strategic Masterplan. Where applications have already been submitted to the Council a Strategic Masterplan should be agreed with the Council prior to or as part of the grant of planning permission.*

5 The consideration and approval of Strategic Masterplans (or any matters relating thereto) by the Board will not prejudge the consideration of planning matters at planning application stage. The Strategic Masterplan is requirement of the Council set out in Policy SP9 of the Local Plan.

6 Any approved Strategic Masterplan will be a material consideration in the assessment and determination of any future planning applications at both officer level and at planning committee that would help demonstrate how the policy requirements of Policy SP9 have been met.

Core Functions

7 The advisory role of the Board is to:

- Inform place specific visions for the Strategic Housing sites that support sustainable communities;
- Provide corporate oversight and strategic direction to the implementation of strategic site project delivery and wider strategic planning matters;
- Ensure consistency of corporate direction, policy & strategy and decision-making from the strategic to the site-specific and over time;
- Support consistency and complementarity of projects, strategies, priorities and decisions between Directorates and relevant Cabinet portfolios and between the District and County Councils on matters relating to strategic planning, climate change and sustainability;
- Ensure effective use of and sufficient resources to support project delivery;
- Receive and consider progress reports and recommendations for approval of Strategic Masterplan documents;
- Agree approval process and timing for Strategic Masterplans;
- Help with the resolution and or co-ordination of strategic issues, including identification and prioritisation of green, social and physical infrastructure and s106 obligations;
- To provide, where applicable, a recommendation to the Service Director: Regulatory on the draft masterplan documentation to be subject to formal public consultation;
- To provide, where applicable, a recommendation to the Service Director: Regulatory on the final draft Strategic Masterplans and recommending their formal approval by the Council to Cabinet and Full Council (where this applies);
- Oversee the initial review of the Local Plan required by Policy IMR2 by the end of 2023; and
- Provide strategic guidance and oversight of any formal review of the Local Plan (in whole or part) which follows from the above.

Membership

8 Strategic planning matters, including the planning, design and delivery of strategic sites are long-term projects. They are highly likely to span a number of political cycles and leaderships. Cross-party representation with a political balance on planning matters is therefore required. This will ensure a consistent approach to delivering a place-based vision and sustainable and well-designed new communities.

9 The political membership of the Board will consist of one Member for each political Group elected to the Council. This will be the Executive Member for Planning and the deputy, shadow, spokesperson or equivalent for this portfolio from the remaining Groups.

10 The Executive Member for Environment will sit on the Board as an additional member to support the co-ordination of planning activities with the responsibilities of this portfolio.

11 Officer membership of the Board will consist of the Managing Director, Service Director - Place[1] and Service Director – Regulatory.

12 The project manager of the Strategic Sites Steering Group (or any nominated deputy in their absence) will attend meetings of the Board supported by other members of the Strategic Sites Steering Group and Strategic Planning & Enterprise Team as required to deliver reports and updates.

13 Administration of the group including the taking of minutes will be the responsibility of officers from within the planning service.

14 Other Council officers and members will be invited to meetings as and when required. This may include other Executive Members, ward Councillors for specific sites or schemes, senior managers, officers, consultants or where appropriate an external body representative.

Roles and Responsibilities

15 Board Members should:

- Implement the core functions of the Board;
- Have the responsibility to represent their Group and to feedback information to other relevant individuals/groups;
- Act as ‘champions’ for:
    - high quality design and place leadership in new communities and new development;
    - the co-ordination of planning activities and Council-wide approaches to climate change and sustainability; and
    - effective collaboration and partnership working with Hertfordshire County Council and key stakeholders;

[1] Including in their capacity as the Council’s lead officer for climate change

- Promote the recommendations and views of the Board as appropriate; and
- Make every effort to prioritise attendance at scheduled meetings and to ensure a substitute is nominated from the same Group where they are unable to do so.

Chairing

16 The Chair will be the relevant Executive Member for Planning. In the absence of the Chair at any meeting the Board may elect someone to preside over the meeting.

Meetings

17 Meetings will be scheduled monthly.

18 The agenda for each meeting will be prepared by the Strategic Sites Steering Group and circulated to Board members at least 5 working days in advance of the meeting. Draft minutes will be circulated within 2 weeks of the meeting.

Decision Making and Reporting Lines

19 Whilst the Board has overall responsibility for

- recommending the approval of Strategic Masterplans to Cabinet and Full Council where applicable; and
- informing approaches to strategic planning matters that will be reported to Cabinet and / or Full Council (supported by officer advice and recommendations where this is relevant),

it has no statutory decision-making powers.

20 The Board will seek to make recommendations on a consensus basis. Where Board consensus is achieved, the recommendation will, where required, be presented or reported to Full Council or other relevant committee(s) by the Service Director: Regulatory.

21 Where consensus is not achieved, the outcome will be noted and, where required, reported to the appropriate decision-making committee.

22 The Board will receive reports and progress updates from the Strategic Sites Steering Group which will focus on the day-to-day resourcing and management of the Strategic Masterplan process and outcomes.

23 The Board will be asked to consider pre-application/pre planning permission Strategic Masterplan material at the draft and final draft stages as identified in the Core Functions.

24 The Board will receive reports and / or be asked for views upon (i) the Local Plan Review and (ii) wider Strategic Planning matters including those with climate change and sustainability implications as identified in the Core Functions.

1 North Hertfordshire Masterplan Requirements

1.1 Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability of the adopted Local Plan is the key strategic policy to support place-making and design at a strategic scale The policy requires Strategic Masterplans to be produced for all the Strategic Housing Sites and significant development.

1.2 The supporting text acknowledges that the policy has to apply to a wide range of developments in terms of quantum, scale and complexity. The Policy should be applied in its entirety to Strategic Housing Sites but, for other significant development, any masterplan requirements need to be tailored on a case-by-case basis and identify a proportionate level of masterplan detail to secure design quality. In this respect the design objectives and masterplan requirements of the policy should act as a starting point in scoping out design issues and masterplan material required.

1.3 The policy sets out a clear set of design criteria that read across to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code.

1.4 The policy also sets out 'typical' masterplan requirements for Strategic Masterplans for large-scale development. This checklist should provide the starting point for scoping out masterplanning requirements for smaller but still significant development in the context of site-specific planning and design issues.

1.5 The following sections sets out how Policy SP9 can be effectively implemented in practice.

1.6 The Strategic Masterplan requirements of Policy SP9 should form the starting point for identifying on a case-by-case basis what information is required. A proportionate approach will be required that takes into account the scale, quantum and complexity of the site, likely form of delivery and the planning and design issues to be resolved.

2 Project Management & Governance



Figure 1 Project Management Structure

Strategic Sites Steering Group (SSSG)

2.1 The role of the Strategic Sites Steering Group is to support the effective implementation and application of Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability to the Strategic Housing Site Policies SP14-SP19 and other significant development sites as they transition from allocations to the masterplanning and planning application process(es).

2.2 This officer group is collectively responsible for applying and implementing Policy SP9 Design and Sustainability in terms of the screening of applicable sites, scoping masterplan requirements, briefs and project plans and establishing and resourcing, when required, project-specific working groups.

2.3 The Strategic Sites Steering Group, formed by senior planning policy and development management officers, undertakes the following roles.

- To identify development proposals which constitute significant development and identify the master planning and design requirements;
- To scope, establish and agree initial site-specific masterplan briefs;
- To establish project-specific working groups where required and organise the initial 'Inception Meeting';
- Co-ordinate masterplan activity and delivery with landowners and key stakeholders;
- Provide elected member briefings when required;
- Report progress to, and resolve strategic/showstopper issues with, the Project Board

Project Working Groups (PWG)

2.4 These are established as required to provide a focused and project-specific group of district and county officers to drive forward and progress masterplans with the landowner team. Where required, specialist advice on key disciplines (e.g. landscape, ecology) is procured to support the local authorities' officers and recharged through a Planning Performance Agreement (see below).

2.5 A dedicated planning officer acts as project lead/manager. The project manager is the day-to-day contact on the project. They prepare a clear masterplan brief and project plan with wider input from other officers and the landowner team. They are responsible for co-ordinating project activity and for ensuring milestones are met and progress is made within agreed timescales.

2.6 The Project Working Group/s are responsible for the following:

- Ensuring national and Local Plan policy requirements are met at a project-specific level;
- Collectively inputting to and shaping the masterplan proposals to secure an interdisciplinary and integrated approach;
- Providing continuous design quality assessment at different scales;
- Co-ordinating:
    - technical and design advice from county and district councils, statutory agencies and third-party providers;
    - input from community liaison officers, ward councillors and the local community to ensure effective local community engagement;
    - input from wider stakeholders;
- Resolving issues and drive forward delivery and quality place-making/design in accordance with the masterplan brief and project plan;
- Supporting the masterplan process and agree/sign off outputs;
- Providing progress reports to Steering Group;

- Providing ward member briefings when required;
- Seeking Project Board, Cabinet and / or Council approval when required.

Stakeholder & Community Engagement

2.7 Stakeholders will be engaged through at least one, focused workshop event. The Council will assist landowners in undertaking a stakeholder mapping exercise to ensure all relevant groups are consulted. It is expected at least one public engagement event is undertaken to inform the production of the Strategic Masterplan. The nature and timing of engagement will be agreed on a project-by-project basis to respond to the individual project needs.

Strategic Planning Project Board

2.8 In order for the council to effectively and pro-actively shape masterplan proposals, a Strategic Planning Project Board has been established with Senior Leadership from the Council[1].

2.9 The advisory role of the group is to:

- Inform place specific visions for the Strategic Housing sites that support sustainable communities;
- Provide corporate oversight and strategic direction to the implementation of strategic site project delivery;
- Ensure consistency of corporate direction and decision-making from the strategic to the site-specific and over time;
- Ensure effective use of and sufficient resources to support project delivery;
- Receive and consider progress reports and recommendations for approval of Strategic Masterplan documents;
- Agree approval process and timing for Strategic Masterplans;
- Help with the resolution and or co-ordination of strategic issues, including identification and prioritisation of green, social and physical infrastructure and s106 obligations;
- Provide, where applicable, a recommendation to the Service Director: Regulatory on the draft masterplan documentation to be subject to formal public consultation; and
- Provide, where applicable, a recommendation to the Service Director: Regulatory on the final draft Strategic Masterplans and recommending their formal approval by the Council to Cabinet and Full Council (where this applies);

[1] This Board's remit covers a range of planning matters including (but not limited to) masterplanning and delivery. For the purposes of this guidance, references to the Board are in its capacity as the advisory body on Policy SP9 masterplanning and delivery issues only.

PPAs

2.10 Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are an effective and commonly used project management tool for large-scale projects and planning applications. Indeed, they have become mainstreamed into planning practice and support decision-making on large-scale and complex sites and supported by national planning policy and guidance.

> *"Applicants and local planning authorities should consider the potential for voluntary planning performance agreements, where this might achieve a faster and more effective application process."*
>
> National Planning Policy Framework (2021), paragraph 46

2.11 PPAs provide a framework within which parties come together to agree how they are going to take development proposals through the planning process to:

- Support collaborative and integrated working
- Establish the scope and task and clarity on the issues to resolve
- Provide planning certainty
- Increase the speed of decision-making
- Support better quality development.

2.12 The Council expect a PPA to be used to support the preparation of pre-application Strategic Masterplans and for other significant development schemes where appropriate. The PPA would be prepared at the initial Inception Meeting and based on the stages of masterplanning in the following section. It may be appropriate to extend the use of PPAs into any subsequent pre-application advice or planning application(s) and / or use a PPA where a masterplan is prepared within the confines of the planning application.

3 North Hertfordshire Masterplanning Process

3.1 The following section sets out the 10 key stages of a recommended collaborative masterplan process.

3.2 The Strategic Masterplan process seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- Collaborative and inter-disciplinary working to support sustainable integrated design and meet Council Corporate objectives;
- A clear site-specific vision and objectives that are locally distinctive and guide the implementation of development over a long period of time in phases;
- Provide a common design framework to secure design quality and allow flexibility of implementation;
- Provide a framework within which to develop further design instruction at subsequent stages of the project (through outline applications, pre-commencement conditions and reserved matters);
- Create an integrated evidence base and determine development capacity;
- Help to co-ordinate cross boundary working where required;
- Support the co-ordination and integration of development;
- Identify and co-ordinate what green, social and physical infrastructure is required (when, at what cost and funding);
- Ensure effective community engagement, including parish councils and build a sense of community ownership;
- Support consultation with stakeholders and their effective input;
- Support a financial viability appraisal and help parties to understand cashflow issues and funding gaps;
- Provide evidence to provide a realistic assessment of delivery through a housing trajectory;
- Assist in assessing and determining planning applications (in addition to site specific and other policies);
- Help inform, support and co-ordinate funding, phasing and delivery requirements;
- Provide planning certainty and speed up planning application process/ delivery through frontloading and early resolution of issues;
- Enable the Council to approve the Strategic Masterplan through:
    - Cabinet and Full Council as a material consideration in any subsequent planning applications; and / or
    - Planning Control Committee as part of the approval of a relevant planning application.

Stage 1

- **Project Initiation**
- Prepare and agree a masterplan brief of masterplan requirements and Council expectations.

Stage 2

- **Inception Meeting**
- Project Working Group to meet with applicant team and agree masterplan brief and project plan to steer the masterplan preparation and process. This meeting would establish the PPA if used.

Stage 3

- **Technical Surveys & Baseline Report**
- PWG meeting to agree baseline report confirming evidence base, constraints and opportunities and vision and place-making objectives

Stage 4

- **Strategic Masterplan Options**
- Stakeholder Workshop
- Preparation of Masterplan Options

Stage 5

- **Design Review**
- Collaborative design workshop

Stage 6

- **Preferred Option**
- Agreement of Preferred option
- PWG meeting

Stage 7

- **Draft Strategic Masterplan**
- Stakeholder Workshop
- PWG meeting

Stage 8

- **Public Consultation**
- . A public consultation exhibition or workshop/drop in event(s)

Stage 9

- **Final Strategic Masterplan**
- After public and stakeholder consultation on the draft a final version would be agreed by the PWG and SSSG

Stage 10

- **Approval of Strategic Masterplan**
- A report would be prepared for Cabinet to recommend the Strategic Masterplan for formal Council approval.

3.3 In practice masterplanning is not a strictly sequential process or a one-size-fits all. Rather it is iterative with the evolution of evidence and design testing throughout the masterplan development. Sometimes these stages can merge together. However, these are the broad stages that are widely recognised by good practice and should be used to tailor the approach to the project needs.

3.4 The final masterplan report should broadly contain the following information which relates to the requirements of Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability.

1. Introduction • Purpose and status of document • Scope of Document • Consultation Undertaken
2. Baseline Evidence, Local Character Analysis and SWOT (Understanding the Place) • Historical development over time • Character and Contextual Analysis (historic, landscape, townscape) and key characteristics of place to inform masterplan design • Constraints and Opportunities (technical and design description and plans) to include Strategic Connectivity, Land Use Destinations and Green Infrastructure Network • Land Use and Social Infrastructure Needs
3. Vision and Place-making Objectives • Vision • Set of placemaking objectives that respond to the site constraints and opportunities and local character (and planning policy requirements) • Summary of option development and testing (including policy compliance, achievement of place-making objectives, viability and deliverability.)
4. Land Use Framework Plan and explanatory text of amount, disposition and land uses • Residential • Education • Sport & Recreation • Mixed use local/neighbourhood centre • Green Space
5. **Green Infrastructure Framework Plan** and explanatory text identifying (as applicable) • Key green spaces, (scale, function and use) • Recreational/POS (Parks & Gardens, semi-natural and amenity) • Greenways • Outdoor and Indoor Sports Provision • Strategic Suds • Play (NEAP, LEAP, MUGA other) • Allotments • On and off-site Pedestrian and cycle routes (commuter and recreational) • Habitat to be retained/enhanced

- Biodiversity Net Gain

6. **Landscape & Biodiversity Framework Plan** and explanatory text identifying (as applicable)
   - A written description of the character and value of landscape and habitat and species baseline conditions.
   - A BNG baseline calculation using the Defra Metric 3.1.
   - A BNG Feasibility Report and Net Gain Plan.
   - Existing landscape, trees and ecological features
   - Landscape features/habitat to be removed
   - Landscape/habitat to be retained
   - Ecological Network Plan
   - Biodiversity Net Gain
   - Structural Landscaping
   - No build areas

7. **Movement Framework Plan** and explanatory text identifying (as applicable)
   - Off-site highway and rights of way improvements
   - Location of mobility hub/s
   - Key access junctions (indicative designs)
   - Primary Route
   - Secondary Routes
   - Public Transport route (on and off site)
   - Pedestrian & Cycle Gateways
   - Pedestrian and cycle routes/crossings on and off site (connections to PROW and GI network)
   - Pedestrian and Cycle Connections to key destinations and surrounding public transport provision
   - Bus priority/ accessibility/circulation
   - Street Design Principles & High-level Specification
   - Transport infrastructure phasing

8. **Urban Design Framework Plan** and strategic design principles with explanatory text identifying (as applicable)
   - Development block structure
   - Density/Key Heights
   - Gateways
   - Landmarks
   - Focal points
   - Key frontages
   - Vistas and key views
   - Edges and Interfaces
   - Public Spaces
   - Character Areas and built form principles

9. **Illustrative Layout**- indicating with further detail and evidence how a high-quality design and layout can be achieved within the parameters and principles agreed in the Masterplan Framework

10. **Sustainability & Energy Framework** identifying site wide and building scale opportunities and standards to minimise carbon emission through

embodied and operational energy use through fabric performance and renewable technologies

11. Housing Need and Diversification

- Description of approach to housing mix, type and tenure, AH, specialist housing, self-build proposals to address needs

12. Infrastructure Delivery Plan

This should identify the strategic infrastructure requirements for the following items where applicable.

- Off-site highway requirements
- On site highway requirements
- Utilities (upgrades, reinforcements);
- Public transport provision
- Footways, cycleways and bridleways (and crossings);
- Early years and childcare, youth
- Primary Education (and nursery provision)
- Secondary Education;
- SEND provision (if required)
- Health Facilities;
- Adult Care
- Waste provision
- Public open space/green infrastructure, allotments and play provision.
- Indoor/Outdoor sports provision;
- Flood risk mitigation, drainage and SUDs infrastructure;
- Structural planting/landscaping mitigation;
- Ecological mitigation
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Sustainability and Low Carbon Infrastructure/Measures.
- Noise /air mitigation; and
- Other community facilities identified as necessary.
- Other notable abnormals which could affect viability

Stewardship and management principles.
Indicative phasing plan.

North Hertfordshire Strategic Planning Project Board

SP9 Approval Process – Updated March 2023

1.1 Policy SP9 of the adopted Local Plan requires Strategic Masterplans to be 'agreed' by the Council. The purpose of this paper is to clarify what this approval process will be in practice. This will provide the necessary clarity to landowners and developers, officers and members. This note should be read alongside the requirements of Policy SP9, the Council's masterplanning guidance and the Terms of Reference of the Strategic Sites and Masterplanning Project Board.

1.2 There is no statutorily set definition of a 'masterplan'. However, Policy SP9 provides a clear policy definition within the Council's statutory Development Plan of what is expected within a masterplan and the design outcomes that should be achieved. Masterplans will generally be produced by the landowner / (prospective) applicant.

1.3 It is important to note that the Council will continue to exercise its statutory function as local planning authority through the existing decision-making routes and structures of the Council but with the added benefits of:

- Clear reporting and recommendations from the Strategic Planning Project Board ("the Board") via the Lead Officer; and
- Formal approval by Cabinet and Full Council where a masterplan is adopted as a material consideration in advance of the determination of the relevant planning application(s).

1.4 Large-scale development will have a significant impact on the communities they are located in so it is important that the Council, communities and stakeholders are involved in the masterplan process so they can meaningfully shape the planning and design outcomes.

1.5 The consideration and approval of Strategic Masterplans will not prejudge the consideration of planning matters at planning application stage. The Strategic Masterplan is a requirement of the Council set out in Policy SP9 of the local plan.

1.6 Any approved Strategic Masterplan will be a material consideration in the assessment and determination of any future planning applications at both officer level and at planning committee that would help demonstrate how the policy requirement of Policy SP9 has been met. Masterplans will not normally be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) unless agreed.

1.7 Policy SP9 variously requires the following:

[The Council] *Require Strategic Masterplans to be produced for Strategic Housing Sites and significant development.*

[And] Encourage the submission of Strategic Masterplans for the Council's consideration and agreement before the submission of a planning application…Planning applications must be accompanied by a Strategic Masterplan. Where applications have already been submitted to the Council a Strategic Masterplan should be agreed with the Council prior to or as part of the grant of planning permission.

In some circumstances a Strategic Masterplan may also be required to consider the cumulative impact of more than one site to support a co-ordinated and integrated approach to place-making and design

Strategic Masterplan requirements

1.8 There are differing masterplanning requirements for Strategic Housing Sites and significant development.

1.9 **Strategic Housing Sites** should meet the technical and design evidence base and documentation requirements of Policy SP9(d) **in full**. Additionally, each of the six Strategic Housing Sites have a site-specific policy (SP14-SP19) which requires a comprehensive and deliverable masterplan to be produced for the **entire allocation.** The Council strongly encourages any planning application/s to be preceded by and consistent with an agreed Strategic Masterplan.

1.10 Other **significant development**[1] should meet the technical and design evidence base and documentation requirements of Policy SP9(d) in a proportionate manner reflecting the size of the scheme(s) and the issues to be addressed. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

1.11 The approach to 'cumulative impact' masterplans will be determined having regard to the above requirements and the sites to be masterplanned in this way.

Approaches to approving masterplans

1.12 To ensure qualifying sites are comprehensively planned and delivered, the Council will seek the preparation of Strategic Masterplans in advance of any planning application in full accordance with Policy SP9 and the Masterplan Guidance. This is the Council's clearly preferred approach as it is more likely to achieve a better quality of design process and masterplans as well as the early resolution of technical and design issues and engagement with stakeholders.

1.13 However, it is for an applicant to decide when to submit any planning application on any land and (subject to validation requirements) what documentation is submitted to support that application. The Council cannot require that an application is submitted at any particular time, refuse to entertain an otherwise

[1] Generally comprising residential development above 100 dwellings

valid application or recommend refusal on a point of process[2]. A planning application for strategic or significant development without a pre-agreed masterplan might be submitted following a failure to agree a pre-application masterplan or without having engaged with the pre-application process.

1.14 Balancing this, and the need to facilitate timely delivery of much-needed housing, Policy SP9 therefore also allows for its requirements to be met by agreeing a Strategic Masterplan following the submission of a planning application and securing this either prior to or as part of the grant of planning permission.

1.15 Agreement of a Strategic Masterplan "…as **part of** the grant of planning permission…" will normally only be appropriate where:

- The application boundary is contiguous with (or otherwise covers the entirety of) the relevant Local Plan allocation boundaries; and /or
- It has been agreed that the application boundary is also the most appropriate Strategic Masterplan boundary[3].

1.16 On Strategic Housing Sites, an allocation-wide Strategic Masterplan should not be agreed as part of the grant of planning permission if the planning application boundary does not include the whole of the relevant allocation(s). In this situation a Strategic Masterplan for the entire allocation should be agreed with the Council **prior to** the grant of any planning permission.

1.17 Another scenario where a Strategic Masterplan should not be agreed as part of the grant of planning permission is where a Strategic Masterplan is required to consider the cumulative impact of more than one site and / or take an area-based approach extending beyond the application boundary to support a co-ordinated and integrated approach to place-making and design. In these situations a Strategic Masterplan for the relevant geographical area /sites should be agreed with the Council **prior to** the grant of any planning permission.

Strategic Masterplans to be approved pre-application or prior to the grant of planning permission

1.18 These will be prepared through project-specific groups in consultation with planning officers and relevant stakeholders. The Board will consider these as per the Board's Terms of Reference. Draft masterplans will be reported to the Board by officers and / or the landowner team for consideration.

[2] Any recommendation must be based upon an objective, professional assessment of the planning merits and planning harms of any scheme.

[3] Where a prospective applicant intends to secure a masterplan as part of the grant of planning permission, the Council will consider providing informal and non-binding officer advice on emerging masterplan material through pre-app on a case-by-case basis.

1.19 In the event:

- Officers or the Board identify significant issues with the (draft) Masterplan content or process and do not, or are unable to, recommend its approval; or
- Cabinet resolves not to recommend the approval of a Strategic Masterplan to Full Council; or
- Full Council resolves not to approve any recommended Strategic Masterplan following its reporting from Project Board / Cabinet

then the reasons for this decision will be documented in the meeting minutes.

1.20 The Project Board would then:

- seek to continue to work with the landowner/developer and relevant partners to escalate and resolve any outstanding issues, address concerns and (re-)present any revised masterplan; and / or
- If required as a last resort, report to Cabinet that the PPA / pre-application process has not been successfully completed.

Strategic Masterplans approved as part of the grant of planning permission

1.21 Planning applications are subject to their own prescribed statutory processes, requirements and decision-making and approval processes (ultimately through Planning Control Committee). Unlike a pre-submission or pre-approval SP9 Strategic Masterplan, any masterplan approved through this route will therefore not be formally approved by Full Council prior to the application being determined[4].

1.22 The Strategic Masterplan in these instances will be part of the planning application approval documentation and/or planning conditions and subject to formal assessment by the nominated case officer informed by responses from other local authority officers, statutory consultees, stakeholders and the community to inform their professional recommendation to Planning Control Committee.

1.23 In this respect formal 'agreement' will be achieved through any positive decision by Planning Control Committee on any relevant application(s). This will require the case officer to assess any material submitted to inform their professional recommendation (in terms of meeting the requirements of SP9 and the masterplan documentation requested).

1.24 The assessment of the masterplan will form one part of a rounded consideration of application against the Development Plan and any relevant material

[4] It may be appropriate to seek approval of a masterplan by Full Council *following* its consideration by Planning Control Committee to ensure it can be used as a material consideration for any future proposals that are not bound by the original permission (e.g. a replacement outline or full application on whole or part of the site).

considerations[5]. Any planning harm arising from any non-compliance with Policy SP9 will be weighed in the planning balance against all other relevant factors and will not necessarily be determinative.

1.25 Progress upon, and material associated with Strategic Masterplans that will be approved as part of the grant of planning permission will be presented to the Board for information and on an advisory basis only.

[5] As required by Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

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North Hertfordshire Strategic Planning Project Board

Design Review Protocol – Updated March 2023

Why Design Review?

1. High quality planning and design is strongly encouraged in North Hertfordshire to protect and enhance the District's townscape, landscape, environmental and heritage value and create sustainable places.

2. Design Review is a tried and tested method of promoting good design and is a cost-effective and efficient way to improve quality. It can support a collaborative design process and speed up decision-making on planning applications.

3. It offers independent, impartial advice on the design of new buildings, landscapes and public spaces. Design Review is now an essential part of the planning process.

4. Since the July 2021 update of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), there is a greater emphasis on the importance of securing design quality in new development. It now says that '*Development that is not well designed should be refused'* (para 134). The new wording contrasts to the 2012 version of NPPF which simply required that *'Permission should be refused for development of poor design'* (para 64). This means that the test now is the achievement of good design and not just the avoidance of bad design. In addition, NPPF requires all planning decisions to have regard to the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code to improve design quality.

5. NPPF reinforces the important of using Design Review:

> '*Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include design advice and review arrangements. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes and are particularly important for significant projects such as large-scale housing and mixed-use developments. In assessing applications planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels* (para 133).

6. In the context of such a strong national planning policy framework supporting good quality design, and to complement the use of policies in the adopted Local Plan to secure design quality (notably Policy SP9 Design & Sustainability), this Protocol confirms the Council's Design Review arrangements as advised in NPPF.

How will Design Review be provided?

7. The Council has partnered with Design South East as our provider for design review services. Design South East is an independent not-for-profit organisation working across the wider south east, delivering expert design advice, facilitation and training for local authorities, the development sector and communities.

8. NHDC has chosen to work with Design South East due to their strong track record in delivering design review services to local authorities with a strong and extensive range of panel design experts.

9. If you propose to make large scale new developments in North Hertfordshire, you can get advice from the Design Review panel. The Panel is made up of professionals who have expertise in:

    - architecture
    - urban design
    - landscape
    - heritage
    - transport
    - sustainability

10. The Panel's recommendations help improve the design quality of new developments. We expect developers to use the panel at pre-application stage before applying for planning permission as this will help to secure the greatest improvement to design quality. The panel can continue offering design advice after an application too.

What schemes will require Design Review?

11. We require design reviews for the following:

    - developments which incorporate 100 or more new homes;
    - developments which exceed 10,000 square metres of development floor space; and
    - developments which are in important or sensitive locations or are very complex.

12. We also recommend design review for schemes between 50-100 where appropriate and deemed necessary[1].

13. The Council require the use of Design Review for its Strategic Housing sites. These are the sites of 500 homes and above that are allocated in the Council's adopted Local Plan.

[1] E.g., where design issues are unresolved

14. Planning and designing such large developments is very complex and requires an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to ensure well-designed and sustainable developments.

North Hertfordshire Design Panel

15. The Council has a specific North Hertfordshire panel of experts co-ordinated and provided by Design South East. This panel will provide advice and support regarding the masterplanning and design of proposals subject to Design Review. The panel will provide the appropriate blend of design skills relevant to the integrated masterplanning of large sites. This will also include local knowledge and consistency of advice to protect against the dilution of quality throughout the planning process.

Who can nominate a scheme for Design Review?

15. North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) Officers have a key role to play in nominating strategic, significant and sensitive schemes (which have unresolved design issues and where an improvement to design quality is required) for review.

16. Most schemes will go before the Panel while still at the pre-application stage, schemes can also be nominated after a planning application has been submitted.

17. Applicants will need to discuss the scheme with the planning officer to identify if it is ready to present to, and suitable to go forward for, a design review.

18. Nominations can also be made by elected Councillors at the pre-application stage when they become aware of them or when an application is submitted. Not all schemes proposed will be reviewed. An applicant, NHDC or Design SE may conclude that a nominated scheme does not require a review.

Types of Review

- Full Day Design Review or Workshop (including a site visit). This is required for a strategic site.
- Half Day Design Review or Workshop (50-500 homes) including a site visit.
- Desktop Review of a scheme that has already been reviewed.

19. Design South East will provide costs for staff and panel time during and after the sessions and the production of a report. The costs are paid by the applicant to Design South East. All costs are exclusive of VAT.

20. The attendance of key Council & project team officers at a pre-application Design Review session will need to be funded through a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) or pre-application fee.

Structure of Design Review SE Meetings

21. The key masterplan/design documentation that articulates the design proposals is provided to the panel in advance of the design review meeting.

22. Meetings are chaired by Design South East and last 1 hour and 30 minutes. The meetings are not open to the public.

23. Meetings are preceded by a site visit with the Panel chair, panel members, the developer's presenting team, representatives from North Hertfordshire District Council and relevant stakeholders.

24. Each development proposal is presented by a representative of the developer, or the client, normally this is the masterplanner/urban designer or architect. These are limited to 30 minutes. Following the presentation the Chair asks the planning authority for their thoughts, gives the Panel a brief opportunity to ask clarification and any questions and then gives the main 60 minute part of the review to a discussion of the proposal.

25. The relevant planning officer should be present to provide a statement of how well the proposal satisfies the relevant planning policy context. Other expert bodies with specialist advice may be invited where appropriate.

The Design Review SE Panel Report

26. Following the site visit and Design Review meetings or workshop a report is provided by Design South East. This advice clarifies where design proposals are supported and where there are flaws that require further design resolution and improvement. The report is likely to contain appropriate praise as well as criticism.

27. Where the developer requests the review as part of a pre-application discussion the report may remain confidential unless otherwise agreed. When considering schemes that have already been submitted for planning approval the Panel's report will become publicly available.

Contact

28. After liaison with the relevant planning officer at the Council, if an applicant would like to progress the Design Review process please contact the North Hertfordshire Design Review Panel Manager **Bridie Lebdiri**, bridie@designsoutheast.org.

29. You'll need to send Design South East the following:

- the signed contract
- completed forms
- scheme drawings

30. The contract will be between you and Design South East.

31. Once you've done this, Design South East will confirm the date of their review at a mutually convenient time. We'll contact the invitees and Design South East will contact you to make sure the panel have all the information they need. We will also liaise with Design South East to arrange site visits.

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1. Large-scale development proposals will have a significant impact on the communities they are located in. It is therefore important that Councillors and other key elected representatives are introduced to proposals early on in the process so that they understand them and can contribute to the design and engagement process. Communities should have genuine opportunity to engage with and influence the development of proposals. This paper sets out who will be consulted at which stage of the masterplanning process and how.

2. This paper builds upon the masterplanning principles first approved by Cabinet in March 2021. This protocol relates primarily to pre-application Strategic Masterplans for the Strategic Housing Sites identified by Policies SP14-SP19 in the Council's adopted Local Plan.

3. Where planning applications are (to be) submitted, engagement will follow normal planning consultation processes and should be undertaken in line with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement but this advice will be applied / followed as relevant in each instance.

4. All engagement with elected Member will be subject to the normal principles that apply under their Code(s) of Conduct and the Planning Code of Good Practice (as may apply). In particular specific issues may arise on interests (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests ('DPIs') and any Other Registrable Interests) and Members should not be directly involved in any of the informal or decision making processes where they have such an interest, without seeking advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer and where relevant obtaining a dispensation to do so.

Stages 1-10 Project Board

5. Councillors from the main political groups will be represented on the Strategic Planning Project Board. This officer and member group will allow for project briefing and feedback on proposals through the staged Strategic Masterplan process.

6. The Project Board's Terms of reference set out the membership, core functions and roles in this process. Councillors on the Project Board will act as 'champions' for high quality design and place leadership in new communities and new development and will be responsible for feeding back information to other relevant individuals and groups including their own political groups.

Stage 4 Masterplan Options

7. At this stage the masterplanning guidance requires a stakeholder workshop to be undertaken. This will secure engagement from local councillors. Where relevant, engagement will be required with representatives of the neighbourhood forum for any emerging or adopted Neighbourhood Plan.

8. The Strategic Sites Steering Group will work with the Community Engagement team to undertake a mapping exercise and identify the following individuals to represent the local community at a stakeholder workshop

    - ward members
    - county division councillors
    - parish councillors
    - representatives from adjoining wards / divisions / parishes where proposals are located close to administrative boundaries or otherwise anticipated to have a significant impact on adjoining communities
    - any other community representatives
    - any other identified stakeholders

9. This workshop, which could well be held online, would involve a presentation from officers and the landowner team on the key issues to address in the Strategic Masterplan and emerging options. A question-and-answer session would then be facilitated to secure input to the options. A minute of this meeting would be made available.

10. In terms of other roles held by ward members such as Planning Control Committee members, as long as the Code of Conduct requirements on Interests (see above) and the probity rules of predisposition and predetermination are respected (see below) are followed, this workshop will be a useful forum to input local views and shape the Strategic Masterplan proposals.

Stage 7 Draft Strategic Masterplan

11. At this stage the masterplanning guidance requires a further stakeholder workshop with the same membership as set out above. Dependent on the issues and / or extent of matters requiring resolution, this workshop could be held at this stage if required or could be undertaken after the public consultation (see below). This will be decided on a project-by-project basis.

Stage 8 Public Consultation

12. Developers will be expected to engage meaningfully with the local community on their Strategic Masterplan. This should include ‘hard to reach’ groups. The masterplan guidance requires at least 1 focused public consultation event. The exact nature and timing of this would be agreed with the Council and landowner team on a project-by-project basis.

13. It will be important that this event is not a promotion exercise but a genuine engagement. This will include providing baseline information with maps and diagrams that shows an understanding of the place, its constraints and opportunities and emerging design options to show the community for them to comment on and inform further design evolution.

14. Presenting a fait accompli will not be supported. How the graphics are presented will be important in this respect. The consultation should provide meaningful choice based upon realistic alternatives. However, it may be appropriate for the consultation to identify 'preferred options' either on specific issues or for the site masterplan as a whole.

15. The Strategic Sites Steering Group will liaise with the Community Engagement team to identify the relevant community representatives to involve in scoping and agreeing the nature, venue and timing of this event.

Stage 10: Approval by Cabinet and Full Council

16. Under Policy SP9, there are different potential routes for approval. More information is contained in the SP9 Approval Process note which should be read alongside this advice.

17. Where masterplans are presented to Cabinet and Full Council, Members will have the opportunity to participate in public debate and a formal decision upon the proposal. It is therefore important that whilst Board Members or those participating in the workshops can show a predisposition to an outcome, they should not commit themselves publicly in advance to voting one way or another (see below).

Engagement with Planning Control Committee

18. Involving Planning Control Committee members in the development of strategic schemes through the planning process (recognising their potential dual role as both planning committee member and, where relevant, local ward representative) is best practice and has been promoted by the public and private sector over the past decade.

19. The most open and transparent way of conducting this is a presentation at the Planning Control Committee meeting and could be undertaken where it is anticipated that a masterplan will be approved as part of the planning application or following receipt of a relevant application for which a pre-application masterplan has been approved.

20. In terms of probity there can be a reluctance to secure member involvement because of the perceived risk of members expressing a view and thereby excluding themselves from further involvement. In this respect understanding the difference between predetermination and predisposition is important.

21. **Predetermination** is where the impression is given that a Councillor has made up his/her mind in advance of the planning committee meeting- they have a closed mind and are not open to new arguments

22. **Predisposition** is the expectation that Members will be pre-disposed to good design, sustainable transport, the delivery of their affordable housing policies etc. The essential purpose of Planning Control Committee members is to deliver the Council's planning policies and secure the best outcomes for existing and future residents.

23. In a pre-application meeting, it is therefore perfectly acceptable for members of the Planning Control Committee to express their views on elements of a development provided they do not express a view on the development as a whole being approved or refused. They are expressing their predisposition but are not pre-determined.

24. A suggested approach by the Planning Officers Society is as follows:

    - A brief introduction by officers
    - Developer Presentation (including the outcomes of any community engagement)
    - Members Q and A
    - Officers summing up the main points raised by members which would form the minute record of the meeting.

25. Officers are currently reviewing approaches to Planning Control Committee's consideration of large-scale applications. This recognises that the adoption of the Local Plan will result in a significant increase in both the scale of sites and schemes that will need to be considered and planning activity generally when compared to the Committee's role over the last 10-20 years.

Engagement with Area Forums

26. The Council's Constitution presently allows the Council's Area Forums to receive any presentations from developers on major planning applications for 100 dwellings or above and provide comments accordingly.

27. Any engagement with Area Forums should follow the same principles and guidelines as for the Planning Control Committee above. The approach to engagement with the Area Forums will be considered as part of the review identified in Paragraph 25 above.

North Herts Council

www.north-herts.gov.uk

Our Ref:
REG14WallingtonNeighbourhoodPlan

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14 February 2023

Dear Kate

Wallington Neighbourhood Plan - Regulation 14

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan. We recognise that a significant amount of work has been undertaken by the Neighbourhood Planning Group in preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Council supports the ambition of making the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan and we will continue to work with the Parish Council to help progress the Plan.

We have provided some comments below specifically on the Neighbourhood Plan's policies and where they might conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan's own objectives, our Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

If the Neighbourhood Planning Group needs any further support or guidance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Local Plan

Firstly, the Wallington Neighbourhood plan refers to the Saved Policies 2 Local Plan. Our new Local Plan was adopted in November 2022, and this supersedes the Saved Policies of the previous plan. This needs to be updated throughout the document before proceeding to Regulation 16, the submission version of the Neighbourhood Plan. The Local Plan includes a number of strategic policies which policies in a neighbourhood plan should be in general conformity with to meet the "basic conditions", which form the basis of the examination.

Wallington Residents Survey

The Neighbourhood Plan refers to a housing survey and provide some statistics from responses received. There appears to be some errors in the statistics. For example the Neighbourhood Plan says that there is 54 households in Wallington. The survey had 26 respondents which in the Neighbourhood plan it says this that this equates to 62% of households. However, this equates to 48%.

In terms of the number of dwellings, paragraph 3.7 says the majority of respondents (81%) feel that the number of new properties should not exceed 10. This equates to an increase of 24% of the current housing stock. We wanted to make you aware that 10 units would equate to an increase of 16%.

On location, the Neighbourhood Plan suggests that 80% of the survey respondents feel that the conversion or replacement of existing buildings such as redundant farm buildings within the village is preferred. It goes on to say that a substantial portion of the land within the village is occupied by redundant farm buildings at Manor and Bury Farmyards which, if developed, would provide more than enough space for up to ten new properties which is the number identified in the survey. It is not clear whether these new homes would be market or affordable houses.

On tenure, the Neighbourhood Plan states that the central village has two rented social housing homes and a relatively high proportion of privately rented accommodation, accounting for 13 homes in total or 31% of the total housing stock in the built core. However, this should be 24% if all 54 residential properties included in the survey are within the built core.

For type of housing, respondents said one of the key issues was a shortage of more affordable and smaller homes (one, two and three bed homes) within the village. Smaller homes for market sale for downsizers and first time buyers and 57% of respondents thought that the provision of affordable (social) housing should be a priority.

Affordable Housing

Our understanding is that one of the overarching objectives of the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan is to provide smaller, more affordable homes to allow for young people and families to move into the village and to allow elderly residents to downsize. This objective is supported by the results of the Wallington residential local housing survey which was carried out in 2021. This objective is reflected in Policy W2.

POLICY W2: MEETING LOCAL HOUSING NEEDS

A. All new residential development within Wallington must provide a quantity of affordable housing in line with the requirements contained within the North Hertfordshire Local Plan. Affordable homes should be well integrated with market housing. The provision and mix of affordable units for new development must comply with the National Planning Practice Guidance on First Homes, which requires 25% of all affordable housing units to comprise of First Homes. The remaining tenure of affordable units should be in accordance with the Local Plan or its successor.

B. The mix of housing sizes, types, tenures, and affordability in proposed development should, in so far as is reasonably practicable and subject to viability considerations, assist in meeting the needs identified in the most recently available Wallington Local Housing Needs Assessment. Proposals that will deliver smaller one-, two-, and three-bedroom dwellings, to address the needs of single people, young couples, smaller families and the elderly will be supported, and in accordance with Policy W4 (Reinforcing Wallington's Local Character through Design) of this Neighbourhood Plan.

C. Subject to the other policies of this plan, proposals for community-led housing projects including self-build and co-operative housing will be supported.

We support the making of policies which ensure suitable housing type, size and tenure is delivered to meet the local housing need. However, criterion a) in Policy W2 could be considered as redundant as all development schemes above ten units must comply with our Local Plan affordable housing policy.

Policy HS2: Affordable housing

Planning permission for new homes will be granted provided that:

a) Affordable housing is

i. provided in accordance with the following targets subject to viability:

Size of site (gross dwellings)	Target percentage of dwellings to be affordable
11 – 14 dwellings	25%
15 – 24 dwellings	35%
25 or more dwellings	40%

ii. delivered on-site unless robustly justified; and

iii. genuinely affordable to local people where rents or prices are linked to open-market values

b) The size, type and tenure of any affordable housing meets:

i. the Council's expectation that 65% of the affordable housing required by criterion (a)(i) will be rented and 35% other forms of affordable housing;

ii. the housing needs of the area including needs identified by relevant local authority housing register data, Neighbourhood Plans and any settlement- or parish-level surveys or assessments; and

iii. the requirements of Policy HS3 and will contribute to an appropriate mix of housing across the site as a whole;

c) The affordable housing is secured for first and subsequent occupiers through an appropriate condition or legal agreement providing for

i. the retention of dwellings through the Council, a registered provider or similar body agreed with the Council; and

ii. where appropriate, review mechanisms

d) Relevant Supplementary Planning Documents, strategies or advice have been taken into account.

Where development of a site is phased or divided into separate parts, or could reasonably be considered part of a larger development which would exceed the thresholds, it will be considered as a whole for the purposes of affordable housing provision.

The reference to First Homes should be removed as most developers have cited that the delivery of First Homes is not a viable option. Our Housing Officer has advised that the likely discount across the district will only be 30% which would not be affordable to most people. If First Homes are delivered in Wallington and local people are unable to afford the properties, then they would be marketed to people across the district and ultimately outside the district if no potential purchasers. Therefore, there is a possibility that these properties would not meet the identified local housing need. There are also other restrictions that apply which may preclude local people from purchasing such homes.

The Developer Contributions SPD says that given concerns around First Homes and the transitional arrangements, the Council will not normally support the provision of First Homes as part of the affordable housing mix. Nonetheless, the Council recognises that National Planning Practice Guidance recommends a flexible approach to the delivery of First Homes and, on occasion, there may be specific circumstances where it is necessary to consider their inclusion as an affordable housing product. Therefore, the appropriateness of any First Homes will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In the proposed National Planning Policy Framework reforms, a stronger weight for social rent properties is proposed as the Government consider this to be the most affordable type of housing provision. Our Housing Officer has also advised that previous Community Development Action surveys across the district show that many local people cannot afford to buy on the open market or shared ownership homes and that often the only viable option is rented affordable housing. The Neighbourhood Plan states that respondents of the residential survey showed 48% generally supported the provision of rented accommodation and given the low number of social/affordable units within the village, we would suggest the provision of affordable

housing for both rent and shared ownership (which would be retained in perpetuity) would be beneficial to provide homes for local people and ensure sustainability of the village.

Policy W3 describes infilling development within the build core as extensions or new development in between existing residential dwellings. However, it is our view that infilling development is development that takes places anywhere within the built core including previously developed sites. We understand that Policy W2 prescribes a threshold of two units for infilling development. It is our opinion that this policy will restrict your plan's objective of achieving affordable housing within the village. As stated above, our Local Plan's affordable housing requirements are only triggered on housing schemes of 10 plus units and for S106 agreements the threshold is for ten plus units. Therefore, if future planning schemes are limited to two units there would be no requirement to provide these as affordable homes. To achieve affordable housing in Wallington and Rushden, a rural exception site could be delivered outside of the village core on greenfield land or the village would have to rely on the landowner's good will to market the land at a lower price.

From our experience, setting a size threshold on infill development can lead to an inefficient use of space. It is our view that development proposals for infilling development should be considered on a case-by-case basis to reflect the size of the land and the character of the area. As highlighted in our informal comments, Paragraphs 124 and 125 of the NPPF identifies that local planning authorities must ensure efficient development on land and to ensure developments achieve appropriate housing densities. It is our view that Policy W3 restricts future planning opportunities to provide the right type of housing to meet the identified housing need. In reality, if infill development was capped at two units and the plot of land was of a considerable size, there would be a point of contention between the Neighbourhood Plan's objectives and the NPPF. To satisfy both, it is likely a developer would build two larger homes to comply with both policies and these will be marketed at a higher rate due to their size and location. We would also point out that the residential survey identified that 66% of residents agreed that terrace housing would be suitable in the village. However, Policy W2 would preclude terraced housing as they count as three plus units.

The Neighbourhood Plan has identified Manor Farm as an ideal site for redevelopment for up to ten properties. The Council agrees with this approach of identifying suitable brownfield sites which could be redeveloped for housing or for employment use. However, brownfield sites would also have to comply with policies in the Neighbourhood Plan. If they are located within the defined village core, Policy W3 would restrict the site to providing two units under the current wording. It is also not clear from the Neighbourhood Plan if it is the intention to market these new properties at full market value or affordable and there would be no requirement under our Local Plan policy to make these homes affordable as it would bring forward under eleven units.

POLICY W3: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE BUILT CORE

A. Within the built core of Wallington, the following will be supported:

i. Infilling comprising extensions or new developments, between existing residential development where infilling development is defined as the development of a small gap in an otherwise built-up frontage for no more than two dwellings; and
ii. The redevelopment of brownfield and previously developed former agricultural sites; and

where the following criteria are met:

iii. proposals should seek to address identified local housing needs, in accordance with Policy W2; and
iv. proposals are expected to preserve and enhance the local character of Wallington, in accordance with Policy W5 of this Neighbourhood Plan, following the guidance contained in the Wallington Design Guidelines and Codes[9]; and
v. development must reflect the prevailing density of the village; and
vi. development must not unacceptably reduce the level of private amenity space provision for existing residential properties; and
vii. development must have a direct highway access; and
viii. development should not adversely affect the significant heritage assets, including where relevant the special interest, character and appearance of the Conservation Area, as set out in the Conservation Area Statement; and
ix. the proposal would not have significant unacceptable impacts upon the local road network, in accordance with Policy W4 (Character and Design of development); and
x. the development must be capable of connecting to key infrastructure, including sewerage, power and broadband.
xi. where appropriate, development proposals should incorporate sustainable drainage facilities which, where practicable, enhance wildlife and biodiversity in their immediate locality.

B. Proposals for development of back-land sites, including residential garden land within the built core, will not be supported where it would result in significant harm to the character and appearance of the local area.

Reinforcing the Character of Wallington Village

A second objective of the Wallington Neighbourhood Plan is to reinforce the distinctive character of the village through policies which safeguard local heritage assets and establishing design principles for new developments. We would like to reassure you that any new development would be subject to an assessment to make sure there is no harm to the Wallington Conservation Area. We support and encourage the making of design codes to deliver good design that is sympathetic to the village. However, we feel that requiring all new developments to have a direct highway frontage is not necessary and it might restrict future development. We note that some homes within the villages do not have a direct highway frontage so this would not be out of character for Wallington and Rushden.

With regard to private amenity space in Policy W3, we recommend that the Neighbourhood Plan provides additional explanatory text which explains what private amenity space is and how it can be measured. We would also recommend the Neighbourhood Plan to set a percentage threshold to ensure that there is clear understanding to what is considered to be an unacceptable loss of private amenity space. The policies in Neighbourhood Plan form part of the basis for planning and development control decisions and therefore, they need to be clear and unambiguous. Otherwise, when assessing planning applications, the Planning Officer will have to interpret what is an unacceptable loss. Criterion x of Policy W3 is considered to be redundant as connecting to key infrastructure would be a requirement under Development Control.

Turning to Policy W4, criterion v, the Plan cannot set timings for when outdoor lighting should be turned off and this cannot be enforced. Instead, the plan could put in policies to ensure appropriate lighting design for rural areas such as the direction of the lighting.

POLICY W4: REINFORCING WALLINGTON'S LOCAL CHARACTER THROUGH DESIGN

A. Development is expected to preserve and enhance the local character of Wallington. The design of new development should take account of the local context and reflect the natural and built character and vernacular of the area, in terms of architecture and materials, to avoid building design that is inappropriate to the Plan area. Careful consideration should be given to the impact of the development on the openness of the landscape. Innovation in design will be supported, however, only where this demonstrably enhances the quality of the built form in the area.

B. As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should address the following criteria:

i. be guided by the principles included in the Wallington Design Guidance and Codes (2021)[14], the Wallington Conservation Area Character Statement (2019)[15] and the North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment[16]; and

ii. meeting the principles of Building for a Healthy Life unless alternative principles would result in a higher quality of design. Development proposals that would achieve the Building for a Healthy Life commendation will be particularly supported; and

iii. for residential development, addressing the principles of Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI)[17]. Such dwellings may also be suitable for younger residents and are not intended to be restricted to particular users; and

iv. minimise its impact on both designated and non-designated heritage assets, in accordance with Policy W5; and

v. Development should not detract from the unlit environment of the Parish. Security, outside lighting, and floodlighting should be designed to be deflected downwards and switched off no later than midnight, except in the case of motion-sensitive security lighting; and

vi. Not have a significant detrimental impact on the local views as set out in Policy W7; and

vii. Make a positive contribution to the visual appearance of the main highway approaches into the settlements: Wallington Road and The Street, which should include adding tree planting or the provision of roadside green verges; and

viii. Ensuring safe pedestrian, and where feasible cycle, access to link up with the existing footpath network; and

ix. Ensuring that traffic generation and parking does not adversely affect vehicular and pedestrian safety. The use of sustainable transport modes should be promoted by providing space for cycle parking and provision of electric vehicle charging points. Residential parking provision should be in accordance with the NHDC Parking standards[18], with priority given to adequate off-road parking for residents, visitors and service vehicles; and

x. Ensuring that areas requiring service and maintenance including watercourses are accessible at all times.

The Council supports the designation of non-designated heritage assets and the requirement of producing Heritage Statements to ensure new development does not impact the identified heritage assets within the village. To assist with this, it is recommended a catchment buffer is added to Policy W5 to trigger the requirement of Heritage Statements.

POLICY W5: HERITAGE ASSETS IN WALLINGTON

A. The Neighbourhood Plan identifies the following five buildings and structures (as detailed in Appendix D) as a non-designated heritage assets:

1. **Village Hall**
2. **Village bus shelter**
3. **Well Pond structure**
4. **11 – 13 The Street**
5. **Village Pump**

B. Development proposals affecting heritage assets – including the non-designated heritage assets - either directly or indirectly, should enhance the significance and setting of the asset. This could include, where appropriate, the delivery of development that will make a positive contribution to, or better reveal the significance of, the heritage asset, or reflect and enhance local character and distinctiveness with particular regard given to the prevailing styles of design and use of materials in a local area. Proposals are expected to be accompanied by a Heritage Statement.

C. Development proposals should demonstrate that they have taken into account the potential impact on above and below ground archaeological deposits to ensure that evidence which could contribute to the understanding of human activity and past environments is not lost. Where a scheme has a potential impact on archaeological remains (below or above ground) a Heritage Statement or similar should be prepared in support of planning applications.

Preserving the natural setting

A third overarching objective of the neighbourhood plan is to preserve the existing natural environment through maximising biodiversity and safeguarding valued green spaces within the village.

POLICY W9: LOCAL GREEN SPACES

The following 13 spaces, as shown on Figures 7.2 and 7.3, are designated as Local Green Spaces:

1. **Mutcheaps Field**
2. **The Chase Meadow**
3. **Village Hall playground**
4. **The Wick**
5. **The Park**
6. **Plough Paddock and adjacent roadside space**
7. **St Mary's Wallington Churchyard**
8. **Kitt's Piece**
9. **Wallington Village Pond**
10. **The Well Pond and surrounding area, including the Church bankside opposite**
11. **Carter's/ Parsons Pond**
12. **The Spinney**
13. **The Common**

Inappropriate development will not be supported except in very special circumstances.

Generally, we support the designation of Local Green Spaces. To designate Local Green Spaces conditions found in paragraphs 101 to 103 of the NPPF need to be met. Paragraph 102 of the NPPF sets out a criterion for designating Local Green Spaces. The Neighbourhood Planning steering group must be confident that each site satisfies the following criterion:

a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;

b) demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and

c) local in character and is not an extensive tract of land

It is advised that the Neighbourhood plan should include confirmation that the land owners of the proposed sites agree to this designation as this type of designation would give the land the same safeguarding protection as Green Belt, in accordance to paragraph 103 of the NPPF. This means development cannot take place on this site except in special circumstances.

In appendix F, it is acknowledged that LGS1 is a privately owned garden. It is our view that this land is an important space in the Wallington Conservation Area. However, it does not meet the criterion set out in paragraph 102 of the NPPF as it does not say that it has any community use and therefore value to the community. Unless the land owner confirms to the designation, we feel that this site does not meet the requirements.

For Plough Paddock, car parking is included within the information about this site. We advise that this use does not meet the conditions of paragraph 102 of the NPPF. If the Neighbourhood Plan wants to protect the space for car parking, we would suggest the plan includes a policy specifically for this purpose.

Developer Contributions

We understand that the Parish Council is keen to influence the way in which developer contributions should be spent. This is set out in section 10 of the Neighbourhood Plan. We would like to make the Parish Council aware that the threshold for section 106 agreements is 10 units under one application. In this instance, it is unlikely that developer contributions will be received in Wallington as there are no allocations for housing in the Local Plan and it is considered that only infilling development is acceptable within the village core that would be unlikely to exceed this threshold based upon the draft policies.

However the west of the Parish (in particular) will be close to the significant developments that are being proposed by the Council around Baldock. If there are projects or improvements that the Parish Council might wish to see (partially) funded by this development these could be identified. Any projects or funding would need to meet the legal requirements of being necessary and sufficiently related to the proposed development to justify any requests.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a planning charge, introduced by the Planning Act 2008, as a tool for local authorities in England and Wales to help deliver infrastructure to support the development of their area. This charge would apply to all housing development. If CIL were to be implemented, then it is likely that the village could receive some modest contributions.

North Herts Council

www.north-herts.gov.uk

By email only:
PlanningPolicyConsultation@levellingup.gov.uk

Our Ref: Planning reform

Your Ref:

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2 March 2023

Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy

Please find below the response from North Herts Council in relation to your recent consultation on the reforms to national planning policy.

1 **Do you agree that local planning authorities should not have to continually demonstrate a deliverable 5-year housing land supply (5YHLS) as long as the housing requirement set out in its strategic policies is less than 5 years old?**

This proposal does away with challenges to housing figures and encourages LA's to produce and adopt Local Plans in a timely fashion.

It also is a clear indicator to developers that challenge of housing supply will not be a tool by which they can appeal planning decisions.

This is an element of change that we support.

2 **Do you agree that buffers should not be required as part of 5YHLS calculations (this includes the 20% buffer as applied by the Housing Delivery Test)?**

The addition of buffers makes the process more complex and removing them and adopting a more simplistic approach is supported. This makes things clear for the LA, developers and members of the public too.

We recognise that the removal of the buffers may seem to indicate that not enough housing will be delivered, but the calculation of housing need in the first instance is based on figures and not arbitrary buffer figures

3 **Should an oversupply of homes early in a plan period be taken into consideration when calculating a 5YHLS later on or is there an alternative approach that is preferable?**

Oversupply should be taken into account. If the LA has been successful in overproviding in the early stages of the Plan period, then this should mean that less delivery is required in the later stages. This helps deal with the delivery of large strategic sites which may boost delivery in the earlier years. It means that there is a clear position of what should

be delivered, what has been delivered and what is left to deliver without the complications of additional pressure to meet additional need relating to oversupply and annual delivery rates.

4 What should any planning guidance dealing with oversupply and undersupply say?

Any planning guidance should be clear that when looking at a 5 year period for housing delivery, there is clarity on the expectations of what the LA should be doing. This could take the simple form of a flow chart, starting with 'does the LA have an up to date Local Plan adopted in the last 5 years?' 'yes'/'no'.

At the moment, there is guidance on when a LA does have an up-to-date Plan, but what is the process if it doesn't? What is the process if the out-of-date plan is not in the control of the LA, for example, an extraordinarily long examination period?

More guidance needs to be provided on these elements as it has already been acknowledged earlier in the text that the majority of LA's have out of date Plans so rather than focusing on the minority, the guidance should be clearer and more succinct for the majority.

5 Do you have any views about the potential changes to paragraph 14 of the existing Framework and increasing the protection given to neighbourhood plans?

It makes sense to bring the Neighbourhood Plan protection in line with Local Plans i.e., from 2 years to 5 years.

It encourages Parishes to have NP and all the protections afforded to them by one and not in relation to the potential delivery failings of the LA.

6 Do you agree that the opening chapters of the Framework should be revised to be clearer about the importance of planning for the homes and other development our communities need?

The entire Framework should be revised to reflect the importance of sustainable development, not only of housing but also other development that our communities need.

The Framework is vague on what are 'important areas, assets or local characteristics' and more specific examples of what these constitute should be provided to reduce the amount of interpretation. Given the amount of Climate Emergencies that have been declared by LA's it would seem that protecting our environmental assets is of primary concern and so the opening chapters should reflect this.

7 What are your views on the implications these changes may have on plan-making and housing supply?

We may struggle to simultaneously enable greater consultation and quicker local plans. While these two goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive greater housing development can be stymied by a lack of community consent, and that veto-points within the existing system can lead to frustrating situations for those trying to build affordable housing.

8 Do you agree that policy and guidance should be clearer on what may constitute an exceptional circumstance for the use of an alternative approach for assessing local housing needs? Are there other issues we should consider alongside those set out above?

Policy and guidance should be crystal clear on what constitutes exceptional circumstances for the use of an alternative approach to the standard methodology and this should be adhered to strictly by councils and inspectors alike, once those circumstances are digressed from, the floodgates will open for all sorts of interpretation.

9 Do you agree that national policy should make clear that Green Belt does not need to be reviewed or altered when making plans, that building at densities significantly out of character with an existing area may be considered in assessing whether housing need can be met, and that past over-supply may be taken into account?

The assessment of Green Belt should be made as part of the evidence for a Local Plan (or Local Plan Review if it is deemed necessary). The decision to then alter the Green Belt should be a decision that comes out of the review of the assessment – one should inform the other, in the same way that all other decisions relating to the development of a Local Plan takes place.

With regard to housing densities, this assessment will need to be made as part of the Local Plan process and then the housing need is agreed following an agreement on want would constitute out of character in an existing area. It would be helpful to understand the thought process behind this thinking. Are you considering that quaint rural villages should retain a low housing density whilst town centres could increase densities significantly by virtue of their land use, if so, is this not something that we as planners already consider when looking at housing allocations etc.? It is not clear what this objective is entirely being aimed at and how it differs to what planners already assess.

Past oversupply from a previous/current plan period should absolutely be taken into consideration and off-set against the 'new' housing target. This will not penalise LA's that have delivered above and beyond their current target.

10 Do you have views on what evidence local planning authorities should be expected to provide when making the case that need could only be met by building at densities significantly out of character with the existing area?

A character assessment of each settlement over 10 dwellings, or every defined neighbourhood if the district is an entire individual settlement, should be carried out to determine the building density of the existing area and then a tolerance level above and below that density can be set to determine a density that is not out of character.

However, there should be a clearer definition of "Significantly out of character with the existing area" to give LA's more certainty.

11 Do you agree with removing the explicit requirement for plans to be 'justified', on the basis of delivering a more proportionate approach to examination?

Provided that 'justification' is not removed from the requirements for plans as a whole, there seems to be no reason why the explicit 'justified' could not be removed. Plan production is an evidence-based process and so 'justification' is always going to be a part of that process and that cannot be removed, however a proportionate approach must be justified whether that is over-providing or under-providing i.e., housing, infrastructure etc

12 Do you agree with our proposal to not apply revised tests of soundness to plans at more advanced stages of preparation? If no, which if any, plans should the revised tests apply to?

A line has to be drawn somewhere and provided that this is applied consistently to all plans in the plan process then there is no reason why this should be opposed. However, councils should not be penalised should they wish to pause their plan process to incorporate the changes that these revisions to the pan-making process proposes.

13 Do you agree that we should make a change to the Framework on the application of the urban uplift?

There are no areas in North Herts that are subject to the Urban Uplift.

14 What, if any, additional policy or guidance could the department provide which could help support authorities plan for more homes in urban areas where the uplift applies?

There are no areas in North Herts that are subject to the Urban Uplift.

15 How, if at all, should neighbouring authorities consider the urban uplift applying, where part of those neighbouring authorities also functions as part of the wider economic, transport or housing market for the core town/city?

There are no areas in North Herts that are subject to the Urban Uplift.

16 Do you agree with the proposed 4-year rolling land supply requirement for emerging plans, where work is needed to revise the plan to take account of revised national policy on addressing constraints and reflecting any past over-supply? If no, what approach should be taken, if any?

North Herts does not have a view on this issue at this time.

17 Do you consider that the additional guidance on constraints should apply to plans continuing to be prepared under the transitional arrangements set out in the existing Framework paragraph 220?

North Herts does not have a view on this issue at this time.

18 Do you support adding an additional permissions-based test that will 'switch off' the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development where an authority can demonstrate sufficient permissions to meet its housing requirement?

This would be an extremely useful development, as it would enable LAs to prove that the planning system in their area is working as anticipated, and that sufficient homes are in train. Housing is a strongly cyclical business, and there may be down-turn years where completions do not match requirement, at no fault of the local authority's own procedures. Therefore, judging local authorities on the metrics they can control – permissions – rather than a metric that they can often only control indirectly – build out – makes more sense.

19 Do you consider that the 115% 'switch-off' figure (required to turn off the presumption in favour of sustainable development Housing Delivery Test consequence) is appropriate?

North Herts does not have a view on the exact number of houses to trigger this impact at this time.

20 Do you have views on a robust method for counting deliverable homes permissioned for these purposes?

North Herts does not have a view on the exact procedure to count deliverable homes at this time.

21 What are your views on the right approach to applying Housing Delivery Test consequences pending the 2022 results?

North Herts does not have a view on this issue at this time.

22 Do you agree that the government should revise national planning policy to attach more weight to Social Rent in planning policies and decisions? If yes, do you have any specific suggestions on the best mechanisms for doing this?

If there is enough evidence to support that social rent is the most affordable housing tenure. To achieve this, the best mechanism would be to introduce a percentage policy to secure social rent housing within the 10% requirement on larger developments; i.e., within the 10% of affordable housing units on a site, 70% should of these homes should be of social rent.

23 Do you agree that we should amend existing paragraph 62 of the Framework to support the supply of specialist older people's housing?

If evidence suggests that there is a need for specialist older people's housing. Not clear on what mechanisms the Taskforce will introduce. More information is required to understand what changes are going to be made and the impact of these changes. Local area housing needs assessments should be the main evidence to determine whether elderly accommodation is needed in settlements.

24 Do you have views on the effectiveness of the existing small sites policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (set out in paragraph 69 of the existing Framework)?

Our Local Plan is based on the old NPPF so we have not adopted this policy in our Plan. As a Council we would want to support small sites coming forward to help diversify the housing market. Achieving 10% might be difficult for some Councils, as there is a restriction on land available for development; this 10% could be achieved through the brownfield register.

25 How, if at all, do you think the policy could be strengthened to encourage greater use of small sites, especially those that will deliver high levels of affordable housing?

This policy could be strengthened by asking LA to submit monitoring data of housing sites that are proposed to be delivered (or permissioned) and their sizes.

26 Should the definition of "affordable housing for rent" in the Framework glossary be amended to make it easier for organisations that are not Registered Providers – in particular, community-led developers and almshouses – to develop new affordable homes?

There needs to be more clarity on affordable housing for rent and how community-led housing can achieve this.

27 Are there any changes that could be made to exception site policy that would make it easier for community groups to bring forward affordable housing?

It would be useful if these exception sites could be supported by national legislation.

28 Is there anything else that you think would help community groups in delivering affordable housing on exception sites?

- Online resources
- Dedicated community-led housing officer
- Local Authority Officer and Council Member training
- Written national guidance on securing community-led housing/good design/ community participation etc.

29 Is there anything else national planning policy could do to support community-led developments?

Introduce a national policy percentage requirement for self-build -which community-led developments fall into that Local Authorities should adopt in their Local Plans.

30 Do you agree in principle that an applicant's past behaviour should be taken into account into decision making?

There should be some consideration for past behaviour when assessing planning applications. This should be largely looking at whether they've built the development to the agreed plans and all S106 funds have been collected within the agreed timescales.

31 Of the two options above, what would be the most effective mechanism? Are there any alternative mechanisms?

North Herts does not have a view on this issue at this time.

32 Do you agree that the 3 build out policy measures that we propose to introduce through policy will help incentivise developers to build out more quickly? Do you have any comments on the design of these policy measures?

These measures will encourage developers to build more quickly. The requirements of developers to submit housing data to Local Authorities will improve our monitoring systems. In cases where Planners have the option of refusing applications by builders that have had their planning applications lapsed, there needs to be some consideration to external factors that might impact their ability to complete the development.

33 Do you agree with making changes to emphasise the role of beauty and placemaking in strategic policies and to further encourage well-designed and beautiful development?

North Herts supports beautiful housing on principle, and it is only too right that the quality of housing be considered when building out additional properties. However, beauty is deeply subjective, and could lead to increased veto-points where communities could object to a site on beauty, and it would be different for planners to respond with a concrete factual response due to the aesthetic nature of the argument. Therefore, any definition of beauty will need to be agreed with the community in advance in local design codes.

34 Do you agree to the proposed changes to the title of Chapter 12, existing paragraphs 84a and 124c to include the word 'beautiful' when referring to 'well-designed places', to further encourage well-designed and beautiful development?

As above

35 Do you agree greater visual clarity on design requirements set out in planning conditions should be encouraged to support effective enforcement action?

Any system of design requirements should be set out very clearly, to establish what needs to be presented, when, and to what specification. Otherwise, there is a risk that this expectation will become another obstacle to housebuilding.

36 Do you agree that a specific reference to mansard roofs in relation to upward extensions in Chapter 11, paragraph 122e of the existing framework is helpful in encouraging LPAs to consider these as a means of increasing densification/creation of new homes? If no, how else might we achieve this objective?

North Herts has no view on this at this time

37 How do you think national policy on small scale nature interventions could be strengthened? For example, in relation to the use of artificial grass by developers in new development?

North Herts has no view on this at this time

38 Do you agree that this is the right approach making sure that the food production value of high value farm land is adequately weighted in the planning process, in addition to current references in the Framework on best most versatile agricultural land?

In North Herts, land availability is a key issue when it comes to housebuilding. Therefore, measures that may constrain that further would make it difficult to develop affordable housing in the District.

39 What method or measure could provide a proportionate and effective means of undertaking a carbon impact assessment that would incorporate all measurable carbon demand created from plan-making and planning decisions?

Government needs to publish a table of ready reckoners for all types of built infrastructure, probably based on simple dimensions (volume in the case of buildings) and common construction types (concrete slab + concrete block walls + timber floors + brick facing, or piled foundations + steel frame + concrete floors + glass, etc.)

40 Do you have any views on how planning policy could support climate change adaptation further, specifically through the use of nature-based solutions that provide multi-functional benefits?

North Herts has no view on this at this time

41 Do you agree with the changes proposed to Paragraph 155 of the existing National Planning Policy Framework?

Considering the long-term use and maintenance of energy sources seems a good idea. Identifying opportunities for decentralised, renewable, or low carbon energy supply systems is in line with the London Plan 2021.

42 Do you agree with the changes proposed to Paragraph 158 of the existing National Planning Policy Framework?

Identifying opportunities to repower or life-extend existing renewable sites is a suitable addition to this paragraph.

43 Do you agree with the changes proposed to footnote 54 of the existing National Planning Policy Framework? Do you have any views on specific wording for new footnote 62?

These changes would give more weight to renewable sites. Might be worth quantifying how much community support would be necessary? As the impacts identified only need to be 'satisfactorily' not 'fully' addressed, will full support need to be given from the local community?

44 Do you agree with our proposed Paragraph 161 in the National Planning Policy Framework to give significant weight to proposals which allow the adaptation of existing buildings to improve their energy performance?

Improving the energy efficiency of existing buildings is a suitable addition to this chapter. NHDC would not object its inclusion.

45 Do you agree with the proposed timeline for finalising local plans, minerals and waste plans and spatial development strategies being prepared under the current system? If no, what alternative timeline would you propose?

This is not applicable to us as we have an adopted plan.

46 Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements for plans under the future system? If no, what alternative arrangements would you propose?

Under these transitional arrangements, LPAs which have a plan that is 5+ years old have two years to update their Local Plans to the new NPPF. Not sure that this would be enough time to prepare enough evidence work for Plans over 5 years old.

We agree with the 30-month extension for Local Plan reviews after the new reforms go live. Instead of 30 months from when the Local Plan gets adopted. This might impact us as the NPPF states they expect it to go live late 2024.

47 Do you agree with the proposed timeline for preparing neighbourhood plans under the future system? If no, what alternative timeline would you propose?

We agree with this timeframe – any plans submitted after June 2025 will be required to comply with the new legal framework.

48 **Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements for supplementary planning documents? If no, what alternative arrangements would you propose**?

Do existing SPD's transfer across to be Supplementary Plans?

49 Do you agree with the suggested scope and principles for guiding National Development Management Policies?

The proposal to create a clear, concise, and consistent set of National Development Management Policies would arguably make sense.

50 What other principles, if any, do you believe should inform the scope of National Development Management Policies?

North Herts have no thoughts on this area at this stage.

51 Do you agree that selective additions should be considered for proposals to complement existing national policies for guiding decisions?

We should support a preference for densification and redevelopment of brownfield sites that are well-connected by sustainable transport infrastructure and/or services, i.e. close to a railway station or high-frequency bus routes, and integrated into a dense network of safe active travel routes to schools, workplaces, railway stations, shops, leisure/cultural amenities, bus stations/stops, etc. In short, sites that are able to support 20-minute neighbourhoods

52 Are there other issues which apply across all or most of England that you think should be considered as possible options for National Development Management Policies?

Blue / Green roofs and walls should be considered under permitted development.

53 What, if any, planning policies do you think could be included in a new framework to help achieve the 12 levelling up missions in the Levelling Up White Paper?

It's important to note that each individual planning authority is its own place, with its own approach and way of doing things. Therefore, there needs to be respect for these planning authorities, and the funding needed to ensure they can deliver the high-quality decisions that both local communities and planners want to see.

54 How do you think that the framework could better support development that will drive economic growth and productivity in every part of the country, in support of the Levelling Up agenda?

Infrastructure needs to be front-loaded to facilitate development in some cases, otherwise opportunities for development could be missed. This would also help communities accept developments in their area.

55 Do you think that the government could go further in national policy, to increase development on brownfield land within city and town centres, with a view to facilitating gentle densification of our urban cores?

North Herts have no thoughts on this area at this stage.

56 Do you think that the government should bring forward proposals to update the framework as part of next year's wider review to place more emphasis on making sure that women, girls and other vulnerable groups in society feel safe in our public spaces, including for example policies on lighting/street lighting?

North Herts welcomes any measured that boost the inclusivity of our public spaces, and therefore would welcome engagement and discussion about how to make public spaces more accessible for a wider section of the population.

57 Are there any specific approaches or examples of best practice which you think we should consider to improve the way that national planning policy is presented and accessed?

While this consultation makes clearer the relative importance of the Standard Methodology Housing need, it is still an important figure and one that local plans are potentially judged against, at least in default without any extenuating circumstances. It is also a powerful statistic in establishing what kind of housing need is required both locally and nationally. Therefore, instead of the current system where it is worked out by each

local authority, this figure should be collated and published nationally. There is no reason why this could not be done, as DLUHC statistics for each individual component of the formula are available online from various sources. However, to do this is incredibly difficult for an individual to achieve, and therefore, to boost transparency, these figured should be published at least annually (with each new affordability ratio published) and potentially kept updated as new local plans are posted.

58 We continue to keep the impacts of these proposals under review and would be grateful for your comments on any potential impacts that might arise under the Public Sector Equality Duty as a result of the proposals in this document.

North Herts has no view on this matter at this time.

Should you have any questions or require any points of clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards



Miss Deborah Coates

Principal Strategic Planner

CABINET
27 June 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: North Herts Place Narrative

REPORT OF: Service Director, Place

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Leader of the Council, Elizabeth Dennis

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST and A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To outline the Council's proposed Place Narrative for North Herts.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approves the North Herts Place Narrative.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Despite being a district since 1974, North Hertfordshire has no clear identity and needs a point of differentiation within the county. This will help North Herts stand out as the place to invest, live, visit and work in Hertfordshire.

3.2. Currently, the Council and its partners are all telling different stories about North Herts which leads to fragmented communications. A joined up and coherent approach in the future will have greater impact, generate greater engagement and raise the profile of North Herts the place.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. As the development of a Place Narrative for North Herts was recommended by the Local Government Association and is an initiative other Councils have benefitted from, the alternative of not developing a Place Narrative was not considered.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, the Council's Political Liaison Board and the Opposition Leader have been consulted on this proposal.

5.2 Consultation has also been carried out with key district partners: Letchworth Heritage Foundation, Letchworth BID, Hitchin BID, North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau, North Herts CVS; North Herts residents, North Herts College students, settle, local businesses and North Herts Council Councillors and Officers.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 26 May 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 The need for a North Herts Place Narrative was first recommended in the 2020 Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge as a way of broadening the Council's future focus to include ambitions for North Herts the place.

7.2 The North Herts Place Narrative proposal therefore focuses on the place that is North Herts (and the places within it), rather than North Herts Council.

7.3 Through the LGA, and at no cost to the Council, eight in-person focus groups were run in 2022 by the Hackney Consultation Team (from Hackney Council). They successfully changed perceptions of the district of Hackney ahead of the London 2012 Olympics and have supported many Local Authorities with their Place Narratives since as a result.

7.4 The focus groups included key district partners: Letchworth Heritage Foundation, Letchworth BID, Hitchin BID, North Herts Citizens Advice Bureau, North Herts CVS; North Herts residents from our Citizens Panel, North Herts College students, settle residents, local businesses and North Herts Council Leaders, Councillors and Officers.

7.5 Additional desk research was also carried out into existing Hertfordshire Place Narratives and how other local authorities have approached their Place Narrative work.

7.6 There has been no cost to date for the North Herts Place Narrative work. The LGA funded the Hackney Consultation Team to carry out the initial research work for North Herts Council and the branding, straplines and copy have all been developed in-house by the North Herts Council Communications team.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Research findings from the Hackney Consultation Team (Appendix A for full report)

8.1.1 North Herts is a is a mix of towns, villages and countryside that are distinctly individual, with their own sense of community, culture and local pride, which come together to make a sum greater than its parts.

8.1.2 United by their:

- Liveability
- Connectivity
- Creativity
- Challenges as well as opportunities

8.1.3 Four key themes arose in every session:

- Culture
- Community
- Connectivity
- Countryside

8.1.4 The challenges faced by the district were also discussed namely: Pockets of deprivation; a shortage of affordable housing and a lack of amenities for teenagers. It was made clear in the research that we must recognise those challenges within our North Herts Place Narrative.

8.2 Proposed North Herts Place Narrative branding

8.2.1 Using the research findings and partner feedback, a 'bringing together' strapline has been chosen from a choice of straplines by our district Partners, Leaders and Officers. This is due to its focus on people, the link to our council priorities 'People First' and 'Brighter Future Together'; its positivity and differentiation to the other Hertfordshire County Place Narratives (Appendix B).

8.2.2 The branding itself (Appendix C) was developed alongside our key district partners and uses strong bold colours with a heart to communicate love for a place, its people and its cultures and is informal/hand-drawn, giving a nod to the free-flow of ideas in North Herts over the years.

8.2.3 Partner feedback has led to the recommendation of launching with a Master North Herts Place Narrative brand 'Bringing Communities Together' and sub-brand - 'Bringing Businesses Together' with a view to potentially developing and rolling out other sub-brands in the future e. g., 'Bringing Culture Together'.

8.2.4 Our proposed Place Narrative story (Appendix D) has included input from The Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, the Council's Political Liaison Board and the Opposition Leader.

8.3 Embedding the North Herts Place Narrative in the future

8.3.1 Implementing and embedding the North Herts Place Narrative will be key to future usage, buy-in and success. Appendix E includes three levels of embedding the North Herts Place Narrative, based on levels of officer time and financial cost.

8.3.2 The North Herts Place Narrative branding will not be seen alongside our North Herts Council Corporate branding as each brand performs a different purpose. The North Herts Place Narrative branding will sit alongside partner brands, such as 'Brand Letchworth' that the Letchworth Heritage Foundation are developing. Both will have low brand recognition and low reach to start with but aspire to higher recognition and reach as the North Herts Place Narrative branding is used more widely by North Herts Council and our partners.

8.3.3 It will be the responsibility of North Herts Council's Communications team to lead the way with embedding the North Herts Place Narrative in both North Herts Council and Partner communications.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no known Legal impacts or requirements that apply to the North Herts Place Narrative.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 To date, there has been no cost for the North Herts Place Narrative work. The LGA funded the Hackney Consultation Team to carry out the initial research work for us and the branding, straplines and copy have all been developed in-house by The Council's Communications team.

10.2 Should any of the mid options for embedding the North Herts Place Narrative be considered, branding will only be added to items that require re-printing anyway. There would therefore not be any significant costs associated with these and could be met from existing budgets.

10.3 Should any of the advanced options for embedding the North Herts Place Narrative be considered, they will be subject to budget/funding bids and/or partner support. The usual budget cycle would mean that (if funded by the Council) budget would not be available until April 2024. The Council's Medium-Term financial projections are that there is likely to be a need to make substantial savings, which makes it difficult to justify new additional discretionary spend.

10.4 If the intended results are achieved, then they would lead to economic growth within the district. Under the current funding system, the Council does get to retain some of the growth in Business Rates in the District, although it is a small proportion.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There is a risk that the communication of the North Herts Place Narrative will not have the desired impact of raising the profile of North Herts. The aim that North Herts will stand as the place to invest, live, visit and work in Hertfordshire, is deliberately aspirational and even if this campaign is successful, may not be fully achieved. As most of the actions are low/zero cost/effort, it is considered that it is worthwhile to proceed.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The North Herts Place Narrative is a shared vision of how communities across the district have and will continue to shape our future.

12.2 Our shared place vision is the result of discussions with residents, businesses, housing associations, charities, community groups, students, senior leaders and politicians from across North Herts.

12.3 Our Place Narrative is a way of helping North Herts unite as a place around a sense of shared pride and a set of common goals. To recognise not just our strengths, but our challenges too, and to bring people and partners together to celebrate our strengths and meet those challenges.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the North Herts Place Narrative.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no known human resource implications that apply to the North Herts Place Narrative as the work to communicate it will form part of the North Herts Council Communications team’s everyday work.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A, Hackney Consultation Team Insight Report

16.2 Appendix B, Hertfordshire Council Place Narratives

16.3 Appendix C, North Herts Place Narrative branding and straplines

16.4 Appendix D, North Herts Place Narrative story

16.5 Appendix E, Embedding the North Herts Place Narrative

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North Herts Place Narrative Appendices

Appendix A Hackney Consultation Team Insight report

Appendix B Hertfordshire County Place Narratives

Appendix C North Herts Place Narrative branding

Appendix D North Herts Place Narrative story

Appendix E Embedding the North Herts Place Narrative

Consultation Report

Appendix A Hackney Consultation Team Insight report

North Herts Council Place Narrative

Insight Report

Report Date: June 2022

Report authors:
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have your say

Hackney

Background

North Hertfordshire District

Since being brought together as North Hertfordshire District in 1974, the towns of Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Royston have each kept their distinct individuality, maintaining their own sense of community, culture and local pride.

Today, this variety is their strength. In North Hertfordshire they are not dominated by a single place, but are a mix of towns, villages and countryside that come together to make what we are greater than the sum of our parts.

While North Hertfordshire residents might identify with their own town or village before their district, they are all united by the common themes that define them: their **liveability**, their **connectivity**, and their **creativity.** They're a best-of-both location, strongly connected to London and Cambridge but with a life and soul of their own, whichever part of North Hertfordshire you call home.

Connectivity

North Hertfordshire's position is its immediate selling point – we're privileged to have attractive green space and accessible open countryside all around us, yet easy links to London and across the south east.

All four North Hertfordshire towns have fast, frequent and direct train links into London, with Hitchin 33 minutes from London St Pancras, while Royston is less than 15 minutes by train to Cambridge. Next to the M1 and A1, and less than 10 miles to the M25, the district also has strong road links north and south.

This gives North Hertfordshire residents easy access to jobs and activities not just in London, but the academic, science and tech sectors in and around Cambridge and one of the UK's biggest growth areas in Milton Keynes.

Liveability

But location and access to jobs is only part of the reason that people in North Hertfordshire choose not just to come, but to stay.

Our high-quality schools, good leisure facilities and strong public services and access mean everyone in North Hertfordshire can enjoy a high standard of living in what is genuinely a place for everyone – from young families to older retirees.

And liveable places are about more than services. North Hertfordshire has community and civic pride, with grass-roots events and activities taking place across our towns, and a strong desire

from local people to shape where they live, hold their elected authorities to account, and make their towns and villages the best they can be.

Creativity

North Hertfordshire is a commuter belt but without the dormitory towns, benefitting from but not overshadowed by its proximity to London.

As the pioneer of the garden city movement, Letchworth has a unique history, and the utopian spirit that created it is still clear in its architectural heritage, the arts and crafts influences and the independent mindset of the community today.

Each of North Hertfordshire's towns have this sense of individuality: Hitchin is a destination in its own right, with a thriving night time economy alongside boutiques and cafes; Baldock a close-knit community with a village feel and lots of pubs, and Royston a classic English market town with a close community of independent businesses.

Challenges and opportunities

There are also challenges. The flip side of their desirable location is high and increasing house prices, exacerbated by the pandemic and emphasising the inequality and deprivation that aren't always immediately visible.

Keeping the area affordable for those on the lowest incomes, those brought up there, and growing families will be difficult, and so will balancing the changes needed with the need to respect local character and ensure community support. There is also a lack of provisions for young people in the area, especially for teenagers.

Meanwhile, the long-term impact of the pandemic gives them the chance to build on some of their advantages, to use the changes in working patterns to grow the local economy even more, help the town centres to continue to thrive, and foster an even greater sense of local pride.

The Four C's

Based on an overall view from all the work that has been carried out, there were four main themes which will be called "The Four C's":

- **Culture** - North Hertfordshire's towns and villages are brought to life by a year-round local cultural programme of festivals, theatre, outdoor events, and the arts. There is a huge cafe culture in the towns, which helps to bring the community together. With a heritage steeped in the radicalism of the garden city and suffragette movements, the area has attracted writers, artists, and thinkers for more than a century. North Herts also

has an outstanding leisure offer with outdoor and indoor swimming and gyms run by the Council's social enterprise contractor for the benefit of local people,

- **Community** - North Hertfordshire is a place where community matters; bound together by an ethos of citizenship and care for both place and people. It is a place where volunteering thrives, where there are active faith networks
- **Connectivity** - North Hertfordshire is accessible to London Kings Cross in 40 mins, as well connections to Cambridge and also a train from Letchworth to Brighton
- **Countryside** - A love for the natural environment brings many people to North Hertfordshire. With its network of chalk streams supporting unique biodiversity, the area has been described as 'England's rainforest'. The outstanding beauty of the district's countryside…

Methodology

We carried out various focus groups with a range of people in the North Herts district. This included senior leadership such as the Chief Executive and Politicians, businesses and residents, plus Settle and North Herts College.

Sessions were done via virtual online meetings and face to face meetings in Hitchin and Letchworth, as well as some online feedback.

We asked slightly different questions in the focus groups with the Chief Executive and Senior Leaders, as opposed to the focus groups with residents and businesses.

Residents and businesses

Tell us what's great about North Herts?

- Each individual town has a lot of history and are unique in their own way
- A great place to bring up a family, with good schools and education
- Vast amount of countryside and landscape
- Excellent connection links to London, Cambridge, Brighton
- Sense of community in each town
- Very diverse district
- Events that go on throughout the year
- Airport connections - Drive to Luton and Stansted, crossrail to Heathrow

How has the impact of COVID affected North Herts?

- More people moving to the district, especially to Letchworth
- Some people don't feel that much has changed since before and after the pandemic
- Loss of jobs on the high street
    - Hitchin lost 28 businesses since March 2020, but has gained 48 new businesses in that time
    - Letchworth lost a lot of comparison stores and smaller businesses, but saw a growth in independent stores
    - Lots of unemployment, but slowly getting back to normal
    - 25% down on footfall pre-pandemic
- Lots of community groups have lost emphasis
- House prices have increased - Baldock has the highest price increase in the whole of the UK
- Older generations are more cautious about going out and mixing
- Loss of community events
- Towns are busier in the evenings and weekends and quieter in the daytime
    - Markets are busier on weekdays

What are the challenges the area faces?

- Disconnection between the towns
    - Residents tend to stay in their own towns and don't visit others very often
    - Royston more so as it is very disconnected from the other three
    - Lots of competition between towns
- Quite a wealthy district, although it has pockets of deprivation, but prices can be a challenge for many to afford to move there
    - Deprived areas are quite separate from the rest of the town
    - Letchworth has 3 main pockets of deprivation
    - Hitch has 2 main pockets of deprivation
    - Letchworth has 10% private rentals and 32% social housing rentals
    - Not enough social housing
    - Need for more affordable housing

- Employment
    - Big skills shortage, e.g. catering, construction
    - Hospitality industry is suffering due to lack of staff
- Lack of opportunities
    - Some feel that those who live on an estate have less opportunities
- Infrastructure
    - Very car dependent to get around North Herts
    - No easy way to get to each town by train
- Teenagers
    - No youth clubs anymore
    - Not a lot for young people to do
    - No 6th Form in Royston
- Decline of the high street
    - Many shops have gone and a massive surge of cafes have been put in their place

What makes North Herts unique?

- Each town has its own identity
- Excellent connections to London, Milton Keynes, Brighton
- When people move to North Herts they tend to stay for a long time
    - Quoted as “A great place to live
- Lots of countryside
- Places to visit:
    - Henry Moore Studios and Garden - Perry Green
    - John W Mills Sculpture - Baldock
    - Royston Caves
    - Hitchin Lavender Farm
    - Baldock Charter Market
    - Knebworth House
    - North Herts Museum
    - The British Schools Museum - Hitchin
- Heritage:
    - First people to bring Rembrandt to Hertfordshire
    - Letchworth - Sir Ebenezer Howard - Founder of first garden city in the world in 1903
    - Letchworth - First roundabout in the UK in 1909

If you could change one thing....

- Better integration of Royston into Hertfordshire
- More affordable housing
    - Reasonable housing for startups
    - Housing opportunities
    - Affordable housing
- Young persons

    - Support and activities for younger people
    - More play areas in Letchworth
- Economic development - Inclusive growth - ways to improve employment opportunities
- Bus and cycle routes - Better routes and more of them
- Diversity of shops and local economy
- To keep evolving and changing
- Strategic planning
- Working together between areas
- Less car dependence
- Strictness of regulations – planning/licensing
- Deprivation – “bridge the gap”
- Openness to outsiders
- Better retail – an anchor store
- Pedestrianisation in town centres
- Royston - bigger event space
- Public transport within the district
- More government funding
- Broadway Gardens - Could be developed. Very little around it and would benefit from cafes etc. Remove shrubbery around the station.
- Cost of travel
- More accessible events

Chief Executive and Senior Leaders

North Herts - describe the place to us

- 4 market towns that are all unique
- Lots of villages and farmland
- Lots of commuters - People live here but don't work here
- Lack of skills for high tech jobs
- No one identifies themselves as coming from North Herts
    - Lack of common identity
- Royston has its own town Council

What are its strengths, opportunities, and key challenges?

- 4 core towns that do different things
    - No central population centre
- Jobs and skills
    - Falling behind in terms of industry and economics
- Residents
    - Lots of people live here in the area, but do not work here or spend much time here.
    - Many commute to work in London and spend time outside North Herts.
- Growing need for skills
    - High tech jobs - IT and Science
- Residents would not associate with North Herts
    - They would state that they live in a certain area or may say Cambridge for example
- Issue with a common identity
    - What is it that unites North Herts?
- Young person, young adult, working age person gap

What do you want it to do for you? The place narrative

- To be more than just a Council
    - Increase the identity
    - Make North Herts stand out
    - Focus on the wider district rather than certain areas
- Regeneration
    - High streets
    - Tourism strategy
- Market the industry
    - To compare against others
- Increase economic and skill based growth

- Poor relations - Need to do more:
    - Work together
    - Collaboration
    - Promote each other
    - Sharing of good stories
    - Learn from each other
    - Share resources
- Less parochialism
    - Too much attention on certain areas
    - Lack of identity in the wider district

Tell us about the economy of North Herts? What are the growth opportunities here? Who are your key business stakeholders?

- Largest employer
    - Johnson Matthey - Chemicals company
- Letchworth
    - Emerging Biotech industry
- Hitchin
    - Lots of retail
        - No large companies
        - Small independent shops
    - Fancy coffee shops
    - Liverpool Victoria (LV) call centre
    - Dog medicine company
        - Outskirts of Hitchin
    - Creative industry
        - Expanding
        - Manifesto and strategy being built to enhance the creative industry
- Automotive industry
- North Herts college - 16+
    - Good local partner
- Housing
    - Market reacts in the same way as London.
    - Overwhelming demand for properties
- Growing rural economy
    - Small businesses
    - Conservation projects
- Astrazeneca - Cambridge University

What about the people who live here? How do they feel about the place? How would they describe it?

- Deprivation

    - Hertfordshire ranked 135 of 151 of the upper tier local authorities with the most deprivation
    - Wealth overlooks deprivation
- No Council housing
    - All managed by Housing Associations
    - Approximately 3000 people on the social housing waiting list
- Large elderly population
    - Residing in old arms housing, retirement properties
    - Good community set of programmes at centres and charitable services that reach out
- High skills sectors
    - People feel like they can't get into the industry, or they don't want to work in that area so the options are not available for them other than retail on the high streets
- Letchworth
    - In the top 20 most deprived areas in England
    - In the top 6 most deprived areas in Hertfordshire
- Royston
    - Fairly affluent town
    - Has pockets of deprivation
    - Approx. 18,000 population
    - Residents would say
        - Nothing affordable to buy
        - Difficult to buy locally
        - Being rehoused in different parts of the district
        - No social housing
- Ethnicity
    - More diverse than years ago
        - Royston
            - 13 years ago was 99% white or white British.
        - Hitchin
            - Always been more diverse
    - Turkish, Polish, Black and other ethnic minority groups increasing in North Herts

<u>Thinking about the people who live in North Herts, how strong is the connection? Pride of place, identity</u>

- Hitchin and Letchworth
    - Strong sense of identity
        - Either being from or living in - Proud of the place they live
    - Lots of history
    - *"Location defines the person rather than the person defining the place"*
- Residents
    - More likely to say they live in Hertfordshire than North Herts
- Royston

    - More likely to say Cambridgeshire than Royston
    - 2 groups of people
        - Those who have lived there for a long time
            - More likely to moan about the changes to the area
            - Don't want to see the changes
        - Those who are newer to the area
            - Do not know what it was like before
            - More attraction to the area as it is now
    - People moving from London as it is more affordable to buy a home in Royston
    - Fantastic place to raise a family
        - Attracts young families
    - Good primary schools

What are your ambitions for the place?

- Finding a way to perceive the issue around deprivation, jobs, skills.
- Everybody to have access to skills and break down the barriers
    - Creating the access to the skills
        - biggest is the college, but needs more options
    - Apprenticeships
    - Creative skills
    - All good having skills, but they need jobs to feed into simultaneously.
- We want to sell something to the outside world -
    - This is who we are and be part of the success story.
- Connection between opportunities and people
- Community cohesion
    - Everyone feels that they belong, no matter how long they have been here it is still their place - background, language, it doesn't matter
    - Are there opportunities for younger people to stay in the district?
- Finding what we are gonna do for the next 50 years
    - Used to be a rural economic district, but for the last 20-30 years it has been a commuter belt - has its positives and negatives
    - *"If we are just where people live, you don't work here, socialise here, spend your weekends here, it becomes a bit of a soulless place."*
    - Trying to work out what we need to be to see us through this next period
    - Pandemic
        - Has changed things, created opportunities, but found that sense of purpose. Without it, we will just be housing with everyone commuting out, which is not sustainable.
    - Sustainable future - need more opportunities locally
- Council role is to facilitate
    - Don't have much budget
    - Community leadership
    - Putting strategies in place for others to lead on it

- No big assets - trying to buy in the town centre

If you were advertising a job in your senior team, how would you sell yourselves as a place and an organisation?

- Place
    - Attractive
        - visually attractive across the whole district, pretty villages, the hills
    - Ambitious
        - changed in the last few years in the way we weren't before
    - More outward looking
        - too much focus on ourselves
    - Communities come together
    - Growing cultural centre
    - Access to London and Cambridge - great commuting route to two big cities, good train system.
- 340 employees in the Council
- Future is looking quite positive
- People first
    - Internal and External communications
    - Wanting everyone to feel at the same level
    - Selling the local place
- Lots of crossover between the 4 market towns
    - Almost like one conservation. But they have their unique identities.

Visitor and tourist offer - What am I coming for?

- Hitchin
    - Theatre offerings
- Letchworth
    - First world's garden city
    - Broadway Cinema
    - Greenway
- Knebworth
    - Big music events, summer programme (outdoor and drive in cinema)
- Royston
    - Independent cinema
    - In need of a skatepark, to keep kids local as well
    - Royston caves - very unique
- Lots of outdoor stuff
    - Draw in our local residents
- Sharing resources and good practice to try and attract people to the district.
- Good quality facilities so able to get in good national tourings

Settle and North Herts College

Where in North Hertfordshire do you live?

- Hitchin - 2 participants
- Letchworth - 2 participants
- Letchworth (Jackmans estate) - 1 participant
- Little Wymondley - 1 participant
- Hitchin (Westmill) - 2 participants
- Baldock - 1 participant

What are the 3 words that best describe the area to you?

- Born
- Busy
- Clean
- Community
- Friendly
- Green
- Letchworth
- Lost
- Mess
- Nice
- Paradise
- Peaceful
- Pleasant
- Quiet
- Rural
- Safe
- Safe
- Shabby
- Social
- Ugly

What do you like about the area?

- Walkable distance to Walsworth Common. Soon a new gym again which will be walkable. Pubs/restaurants
- I like its lovely towns and villages.
- Not much at the moment
- I love the quietness of living in a village, we have a very strong sense of community spirit and the area is unspoilt with plenty of green spaces.
- close to town and the countryside
- Space, Upkeep of green spaces
- Friendly and green spaces
- Hitchin is a really nice place to live
- I like the fact it is quiet and peaceful

What do you dislike?

- Dangerous, uneven footpaths which I have tripped up and fallen a couple of times. No proper cycle paths like Stevenage. Constant traffic 24/7 where I live. Maintenance and up keeping of flats where I live. Going downhill and looking grubby/dirty.
- I don't like that it seems to be becoming part of the London suburbs.
- Rubbish everywhere. Drugs everywhere. Kids on Motor bikes riding around the park. Unhealthy living conditions.
- I dislike that a proposed plan is in effect to build 300 houses on our green belt. This will not only take away our green belt but also increase the risk of flooding, increase traffic and overrun an already oversubscribed school!
- the lack of respect people have for their homes and surroundings. Ruining it for others. Gardens are a mess. Also too many cats. There should be a limit. You can't have pets if you rent privately so why can't there be a limit for social housing? And fines for those who do not keep gardens in good condition.
- I am starting to dislike the unkempt Social housing garden , containing household appliances dumped in the gardens, unkempt hedges and fence , and lack of community. Rubbish in the streets, unkempt green spaces by railway. And rudeness of the local children and attitudes by their parents
- Nothing (Very Happy where I live)
- Nothing - I like living in Hitchin
- Nothing I can think of

Do you think North Hertfordshire is a good place to grow up/be young?

- To an extent - I like where I live but there are no activities for young people
- Yes

Appendix B – Existing Hertfordshire Place Narratives

Herts County Council:	County of opportunity
Stevenage:	St**even**age **better**
Watford:	Built on heritage. Focused on fairness
East Herts:	A place to grow
Welwyn Hatfield:	Where history keeps on being made

Appendix C North Herts Place Narrative branding

Super brand

NORTH HERTS

Bringing **Communities** Together

Sub-brands

NORTH HERTS

Bringing **Businesses** Together

Appendix D North Herts Place Narrative master brand copy

Located less than 40 miles north of central London, North Herts is a place where people come first and where community matters.

From families whose generations have always lived in North Herts, to those who move into the area for access to open countryside, to businesses building on our history of creativity, a whole range of communities are drawn to North Herts for the quality of life we offer, our stunning natural landscape, outstanding schools, and unrivalled connectivity to London and Cambridge.

A mix of distinctly individual vibrant market towns, beautiful villages and accessible, open countryside, that come together to make a sum greater that its parts, North Herts was home to Paleolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements and the place where the Garden city movement was pioneered. It remains home to three of the World's incredibly rare chalk streams and Therfield Heath, a site of Special Scientific Interest nestled on the chalk escarpment just north of Therfield village.

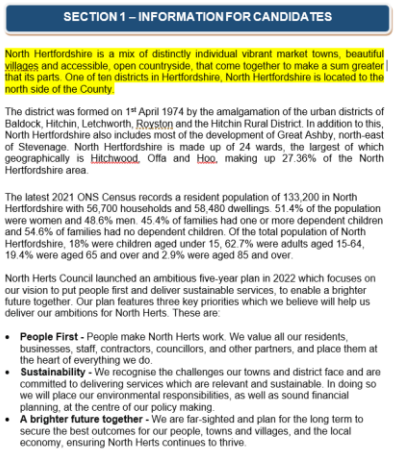
North Herts is the place where everyone can be active in their own way. From our two, treasured, outdoor pools, to our lively leisure centres, parks, playgrounds and sports pitches, there really is something for everyone. Miles of walking and cycling routes connect our places with our unique landscape, which current and future generations will continue to value the mental and physical benefits of living in such a place of incredible natural beauty.

With a heritage steeped in the radicalism of the Garden city and Suffragette movements, our pioneering spirit continues in global leaders such as Johnson Matthey in Royston; leading financial services mutual Liverpool Victoria in Hitchin; and the emerging biotech industry in Letchworth. The arts, culture and hospitality industries flourish in North Herts. From museums to coffee shops and heritage centres to award-winning pubs and restaurants, the business leaders of North Herts continue to lead the way in attracting and retaining the best of talent to the area.

There are challenges in North Herts, as there are everywhere, and we will continue to be open about these. Desirable locations have driven house prices up, we need to provide more for teenagers to do, and there is inequality that isn't always visible. However, the communities of North Herts, as they have always done, will continue to come together, face these challenges head on and thrive.

North Herts is also the place where communities come together through a strong and diverse voluntary sector, faith communities and a vibrant programme of community events. Bound together by an ethos of citizenship and care for both people and place, North Herts is proud to be a place of inclusivity.

Appendix E - Embedding the North Herts Place Narrative

Basic (no financial cost, just officer time)	**Mid** (some cost but only for Point of sale items and only when reprints required anyway)	**Advanced** (funding would be required for these options)
• NHC website – homepage and individual page • North Herts Museum and Hitchin Town Hall websites • Partner websites • Email footers • Letterhead – ours and partners • Incorporate what makes North Herts special into our everyday comms e.g. chalk streams 'did you know?' • Use straplines as social media hashtags	• To inform relevant strategy (i.e. Tourism) and contract procurement docs (see Leisure eg below)  **SECTION 1 – INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES** North Hertfordshire is a mix of distinctly individual vibrant market towns, beautiful villages and accessible, open countryside, that come together to make a sum greater that its parts. One of ten districts in Hertfordshire, North Hertfordshire is located to the north side of the County. The district was formed on 1st April 1974 by the amalgamation of the urban districts of Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and the Hitchin Rural District. In addition to this, North Hertfordshire also includes most of the development of Great Ashby, north-east of Stevenage. North Hertfordshire is made up of 24 wards, the largest of which geographically is Hitchwood. Offa and Hoo, making up 27.36% of the North Hertfordshire area. The latest 2021 ONS Census records a resident population of 133,200 in North Hertfordshire with 56,700 households and 58,480 dwellings. 51.4% of the population were women and 48.6% men. 45.4% of families had one or more dependent children and 54.6% of families had no dependent children. Of the total population of North Hertfordshire, 18% were children aged under 15, 62.7% were adults aged 15-64, 19.4% were aged 65 and over and 2.9% were aged 85 and over. North Herts Council launched an ambitious five-year plan in 2022 which focuses on our vision to put people first and deliver sustainable services, to enable a brighter future together. Our plan features three key priorities which we believe will help us deliver our ambitions for North Herts. These are: • **People First** - People make North Herts work. We value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything we do. • **Sustainability** - We recognise the challenges our towns and district face and are committed to delivering services which are relevant and sustainable. In doing so we will place our environmental responsibilities, as well as sound financial planning, at the centre of our policy making. • **A brighter future together** - We are far-sighted and plan for the long term to secure the best outcomes for our people, towns and villages, and the local economy, ensuring North Herts continues to thrive. • Museum use when applying for grants/bidding for an exhibition etc • Partners use in funding bids • Outlook magazine • Include in external event Point of Sale over time when re-prints required (ie surgeries, local festivals, events) • Campaigns i.e. 'I love North Herts'; 'Bench conversations'; 'Share your North Herts stories' etc • Use to enter and standout in free 'Best Place to live' awards/surveys	• Welcome to North Herts video (to attract people to live/visit/invest/work in North Herts). Could be created with other partners (ie North Herts College/BIDs) and used on our website, partner websites and housing developer sites etc. • Welcome to North Herts website (micro site on existing website?) • A digital welcome pack for new businesses (signposting them to support) • Sponsor an existing North Herts event and raise our profile – think the Cala Homes Snowman trail that made it to The Guardian 'festive things to do' guide. • Encourage a North Herts cultural programme e.g. joint exhibitions across our museums

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CABINET
27th June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Waste Shared Service: Client team and Corporate Support Arrangements

REPORT OF: *Shared Service Manager – Chloe Hipwood*

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: *Cllr Amy Allen – Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management*

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report is based on outcomes from the Member lead joint working group between East Herts Council (EHC) and North Herts Council (NHDC) and workshops held for senior managers. It identifies the approach considered necessary to corporate support arrangements affecting the waste contract administration and management. The key drivers for the changes are to enhance the customer experience in line with transformation programmes by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of processes to support this. The report follows on from previous reports provided to overview and scrutiny and the Executive regarding the future management of waste.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. To agree that each Council leads on their own customer service provision with one set of processes for customer interactions being developed and agreed with a focus on resolution at the first point of contact.

2.2. To note the draft timeline for the transition for customer service provision outlined in 8.7

2.3. To agree to the proposed updates and changes to financial management and governance arrangements and subsequent necessary changes to the Inter Authority Agreement outlined in Section 8.

2.4. To agree the updated waste service policy statements contained in Appendix 2 to come into force from May 2025.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To ensure the effective and efficient administration of the shared waste service.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. For customer services a joint customer service centre for waste was considered with one of the two authorities administering this on behalf of the other. This was discounted due to complications with income management and to ensure that residents in EHC can experience a seamless customer journey through the Granicus CRM system. Details of the advantages and disadvantages of differing approaches are identified in Appendix 4.

4.2. For digital services a lead authority approach was considered but this was discounted due to the recommendation to keep customer services separate and as a consequence integration with both councils' CRM systems will be required.

4.3. For financial management the management of both income and expenditure by NHDC was considered but this was discounted due to additional auditing requirements for VAT.

4.4. For legal services procuring external support on an ongoing basis was consider but this was discounted as cost prohibitive.

4.5. A joint waste committee was considered however was discounted as unnecessary at this stage as service alignment has already been agreed.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 A joint cross-party working group was established to consider the future service design. The terms of reference for the working group can be found in Appendix 1. Elected Members attended a series of workshops over two months looking at all aspects of the service design and consideration of corporate support arrangements.

5.2 With the recommendations contained in this report being internally focused (and not public facing) to ensure an effective management solution for the shared waste service; it is not anticipated that residents will be negatively affected and therefore a public consultation is not considered necessary.

5.3 A report outlining the options appraisals which had been completed when considering solutions for the future was presented to the Waste Partnership Board on 26 April 2023 where the recommendations were considered.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 26 May 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 East Herts Council (EHC) and North Herts Council (NHDC) entered into a Shared Service arrangement in 2017 and a joint contract was let beginning in May 2018.

7.2 A Councillor led Joint Partnership Board for waste meets twice per year and monitors the performance of the contract.

7.3 The service comprises a ‘client’ management structure located at the Buntingford Depot and two operational hubs comprising separate management teams and separate workforces for East and North Herts Councils.

7.4 The current contract covers the requirements for the collection of waste and recycling from approximately 124,000 households and over 1920 commercial customers as well as street cleansing services across East and North Hertfordshire.

7.5 In 2014 the Councils agreed to progress from a Strategic Outline Case to an Outline Business Case for the shared service specifically exploring potential additional savings in joint contracts, savings in client overheads including depot costs, governance and management proposals and jointly agreed policies to form the basis of a joint specification.

7.6 The shared service has been in operation since 2018 and has successfully rolled out service changes for both authorities. The client team have worked to align processes and systems to ensure that the customer experience is broadly similar regardless of in which district a resident lives. The new contract which will mobilise for May 2025 will ensure further consistency between the authorities.

7.7 The shared service client team and corporate support arrangements operate under an Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) which sets out the partnership arrangements which exist for and between the two authorities. In addition for the current contract procurement a Collaboration Agreement has been put in place to provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities in relation to the procurement and demonstrate the commitment to the procurement partnership.

7.8 At the respective East Herts Executive and North Herts Cabinet meetings on 19th April 2022 and 22nd March 2022 a new aim and principles for the shared service were agreed focusing on efficient services which are environmentally and financially sustainable. The aim and principles are attached in Appendix 1.

7.9 A report to the respective Executive/Cabinet meetings on 25th October 2022 also identified a need to provide additional detail regarding corporate support arrangements in a supplementary report.

7.10 To improve the services opportunity for operational efficiencies a number of options have been considered. If the service is aligned across both authorities the client team administration and management of the contract is more efficient providing capacity to improve the customer experience and engagement.

7.11 It has been necessary to review the working practice of the client team and support services to ensure the shared service can operate as efficiently as possible and meet the principles agreed by Executive and Cabinet.

<u>Resources and Waste Strategy</u>

7.12 In December 2018 the government released its Resources and Waste Strategy. There have subsequently been a number of government consultations linked to this strategy. The industry is currently waiting for guidance to support the outcomes of these consultations and the full details of subsequent policy and legislative updates.

7.13 The Resources and Waste Strategy is expected to significantly change the way council's waste collection services are managed and funded. The final strategy launch has been delayed following the pandemic and specific details and timescales for some elements of the implementation are yet to be determined. However it is expected that additional administrative burdens will be placed on councils to demonstrate 'efficient and effective; services in order to receive funding.

7.14 The drafted policy documents in Appendix 2 aim to support the principles of waste reduction and provide clarity to residents using the services. Should the outcomes and finalised guidance differ from our service design it may be necessary to further refine the policy statements.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Customer Services

8.1. Customer service at each council is currently delivered under different models, with differing administrative responsibilities, processes and key performance indicators (KPIs). EHC manage contacts related to waste and street cleansing services in-house as part of a corporate customer service team. At NHDC contacts are managed by the current collection contractor with a small proportion of contacts also being handled by the corporate team.

8.2. At the joint cross party member workshops, members explored options regarding the provision of customer services. Advantages and disadvantages were identified for both a council led customer service solution and an out-sourced customer service solution. In addition, indicative costs were provided for these. The preference from the working group was for a joint council led customer service solution as it was felt this fits better with aspirations around an improved customer journey. At Cabinet on 25th October 2022 it was agreed to have customer services delivered in house.

8.3. The customer services and call handling functions have consequently not been included in the specification of the next waste contract and it is therefore necessary to develop the structure for this support service from 2025.

8.4. Subsequent work has been undertaken with senior managers at both authorities to consider the viability of a joint customer service provision and this has resulted in a recommendation to Cabinet to keep the customer service functions separate, but delivered in-house by both councils.

8.5. Some potential benefits of separate customer service provision are identified below:-

a. Knowledge of all council related processes and can therefore advise on other queries as a single point of contact
b. Greater resilience from a larger staff pool for each council.
c. Monthly quality monitoring in line with other in-house customer service provision at each council.
d. Training in line and consistent with each councils core values and objectives

e. Increased transparency for each authority over contact types and complaint logging
f. Increased transparency for each council on reasons for call handling performance e.g. staff resources, large contact volumes from other services.
g. Direct control for each council over phone lines, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and email auto replies.
h. Direct control and monitoring of online self-serve contacts (see section 8.8)
i. Able to make effective use of council Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems.
j. Service efficiencies (cost savings) can be realised more easily from individual council transformation programmes.
k. Direct control over payments to the councils and therefore no additional VAT auditing implications.

8.6. The waste client team will lead on a review of all processes to ensure consistency of services between each authority and to its residents, these processes will be aligned to support the application of the policy statements attached in Appendix 2.

8.7. It is proposed to transition the North Herts customer service function in advance of the contract change in order for staff to be trained and settled into the customer service prior to contract and service changes in 2025. An indicative timeline is below.

Negotiations begin with incumbent contractor	– Spring 2024
Consultation begins with staff	- Summer 2024
Consultation outcomes and finalisation of proposals	- Autumn 2024
TUPE transfer of staff	- Early 2025

<u>Digital Services</u>

8.8. The council has aspirations to deliver more automation with online reporting functionality and therefore this report should be considered in conjunction with the wider corporate aims and objectives around digital transformation.

8.9. A number of services are already available online with full integration with back office systems including:

- Reporting missed bin collections (approximately 55% recorded online)
- Subscribing to garden waste services (over 80% online)
- New and replacement bin requests
- Collection day look up

This means that there is almost no human intervention necessary from either customer service agents nor the client team in order for the service to be delivered.

8.10. There are a number of other services which can be reported online, however these webforms result in an email being sent either to customer service teams or the client

team and therefore are not currently fully integrated, requiring additional administration to enter into back office systems and no immediate feedback is available to residents.

8.11. All current fully integrated online services are provided as part of the current waste contract. These online facilities will cease to function at the end of April 2025 and a new alternative solution is required to provide a seamless transition for residents.

8.12. Work has been undertaken to scope the requirements for digital service integration prior to the contract start in May 2025 and details can be found in Appendix 3. The majority of this work will take place in 2024 and early 2025 to ensure sufficient time to test systems prior to contract start.

8.13. Until a preferred bidder is chosen, which, based on the current timeline will be in early 2024 it is not possible to fully estimate the time and staff resource required to undertake the necessary integration.

8.14. Colleagues from IT departments and customer services will be involved in the dialogue with bidders to gage the extent of the work required.

8.15. Once processes have been fully mapped time and resource estimates will be developed to determine the extent of any digital transformation work required in order to provide automated self-serve options for residents for all high contact waste and street cleansing services.

8.16. It is expected that estimated costs will be available for budget workshops in October 2023.

Financial Management

8.17. Financial management is delivered separately for and by each authority creating a level of duplication, differing burdens and requirements for the client team. There is also a level of inconsistency in functionality i.e. NHDC can provide direct debits whilst currently EHC cannot, NHDC debtors processes are automated, while the EHC process is not.

8.18. Much of the financial management for the shared service is unaffected by the contractual provisions, however the incumbent contractor currently take payment on behalf of both East Herts and North Herts for garden waste subscriptions and bulky waste collections on behalf of North Herts. This financial management service will not be provided in the next contract as it is directly linked to the decision to provide customer services in house and therefore alternative provision needs to be made for direct debits, online payments and telephone payments in advance of 2025.

8.19. Each Council will independently manage income from chargeable services and although this does not reduce the duplication of work by the shared client team in this area it does provide a reduced auditing burden for each authority.

8.20. For NHDC this functionality broadly already exists, but it is not yet possible to transition these services due to the council procuring a new payment system and financial management system (FMS) and needing to align with this timeline. New setups and testing would still be necessary, as well as online integration for self-serve by residents. It is anticipated that this can begin after April 2024.

8.21. Subject to successful procurements it is anticipated that NHDC will transition garden waste direct debits (circa 21000) and payments (circa 8000) during 2024 in advance of the next subscription year in April 2025.

8.22. For EHC the delivery of direct debits and automated debt management processes are anticipated to be delivered by November 2023 and with necessary user testing it is anticipated that direct debits for garden waste (circa 25,000 for EHC) could be migrated to in-house systems by February 2024 in time for the next subscription year.

8.23. The move to in-house income management for garden waste is also dependent on successful integration with the existing garden waste portals and any subsequent re-procurement of these systems for each authority.

8.24. It is expected that a new contract will mean that both Councils will have the same contract costs for the servicing of garden waste collections. During the joint cross-party Member working groups options for aligning the garden waste service were explored. Members recommended that we should seek to therefore have an aligned price for garden waste as we currently do for bulky waste and commercial waste collections which have the same contract costs.

8.25. At the Executive/Cabinet on 25th October 2022 the principle of aligning the charge for the two authorities was therefore approved.

8.26. NHDC has recently agreed to bring the NHDC charge for garden waste to £49 to match EHC and align the start date of the service to 1st April. The price increase will cover an extended subscription year for residents which will provide a cost saving to them in the first year. Each Council wishes to retain income receipts and therefore at this stage the use of one portal for both authorities is not proposed, but will be explored as an option when the portal provision is reprocured.

8.27. As a consequence of this alignment it is proposed that a mechanism for agreeing the garden waste charges be written into the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA). This will be based on the principle of cost recovery which is aligned to the agreed shared service principle of financial sustainability for the services.

8.28. As NHDC are the current lead authority for the shared service it is proposed that this arrangement continues to prevent the need for staff to TUPE. It is therefore also proposed that NHDC lead on the financial management of expenditure for the shared service as this would reduce the client teams need to duplicate financial management work and detail will be written into the IAA to identify auditing and governance of financial

management. This will ensure some reduced administration and duplication of work for the shared service yet still provide EHC with all necessary information for audit purposes.

8.29. In addition, NHDC will commit to providing a summary of contract spend, on behalf of both authorities, to the Partnership Board.

Communications and Marketing

8.30. Communications and marketing is delivered separately by each authority creating some inconsistencies in relation to corporate prioritisation of waste messages. The NHDC corporate service in terms of officer resource, is larger than EHC, therefore there is potential benefit in aligning some aspects of comms.

8.31. The service changes will require a significant focus on comms with a need for additional resource to deliver more targeted campaign work. A new dedicated Waste Communications Officer post was identified and agreed at Executive and Cabinet on 25th October 2022 and this role will focus on non-corporate communications, such as targeted communications in relation to specific campaigns, targeted local communications in relation to low performing areas and the capture of certain materials in the recycling streams. This will also include working with local schools and community groups for face-to-face communications.

8.32. It is proposed to keep customer facing generic service related comms separate but NHDC to lead on design in consultation with EHC. There will be a continued regular liaison between the two communications teams to ensure messages are aligned and a protocol will be developed with regards press releases and media enquiries and cemented in the IAA.

Legal Services

8.33. Both authorities have ongoing recruitment challenges in relation to contract and procurement lawyers. The current procurement is therefore being delivered via an external provider. As a temporary solution this has been beneficial, but it is not sustainable in the long term due to the significant financial costs of external legal support. A decision is needed on how to proceed with legal advice moving forward in relation to the client relationship with the contractor. Each Council would continue to be expected to seek their own advice on any matters relating to the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) or working relationship between the two authorities.

8.34. At this stage it is not possible to determine if either council will be able to recruit a permanent contract lawyer to support the services. It is therefore proposed that support for the shared service and waste contract will be considered at the point of need by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services /Service Director Legal and Community, who will agree a lead authority for each project based on available resource. Where no resource is available at either authority, external support shall be sought and procured by legal services on behalf of both authorities.

8.35. In relation to property matters each council will lead on their own properties in relation to the drafting and execution of any lease. It is however expected that property services/ estates teams will align the leases for Buntingford and Letchworth Depot (subject to the successful assignment for the current lease from Urbaser) as far as is reasonably practicable.

8.36. Work is ongoing to complete the heads of terms for the leases but it is anticipated that more facilities management responsibilities will pass to the waste contractor. This is to ensure that the responsibilities for health and safety on site (which sit with the waste contractor) can be controlled more effectively and consistently across both depot sites. It is proposed that any remaining depot facilities management functions will be provided by EHC on behalf of both authorities.

Governance

8.37. Historically, some decisions have been taken independently by each authority such as the implementation of a chargeable garden waste service. Given the commitment from both authorities to align services and create effective and efficient administrative processes as a result, it is necessary to review the governance arrangements. The options for governance are:

- Retain model of partnership board and update the IAA
- Delete the partnership board and introduce a formal Joint waste committee
- Amendments to constitution and delegated decision making for officers to facilitate partnership arrangements with oversight by Partnership Board

8.38. It is proposed to retain the partnership board in its current format with some minor changes to the IAA to ensure decision making between the two authorities are aligned. The IAA will be strengthened to provide clarity on decision making processes and the consequences of unaligned decision making which has a financial burden on either authority.

8.39. The key aims and principles of the IAA will include:

a) working in harmony to ensure decisions are aligned for effective and efficient running of the service to residents and customers
b) achieving consensus between both authorities on recommendations for the Executive/Cabinet/Council or other delegated authority to officers
c) sharing of information in a way that supports effective collaboration between the two authorities
d) resolving any difficulties openly, quickly and honestly, before any such issues have a negative impact on the operation of the service or collaborative working
e) providing information to each other that will (or could) impact each authority negatively

8.40. An invitation will be extended to attend partnership board (as and when required) to the Executive/Cabinet members for finance in each authority when there is a recommendation relating to financial implications.

8.41. Ensure there is a dispute resolution process in place with both Heads of Paid services should consensus or agreement not be achieved.

Policy Statements

8.42. Policy statements for the current waste and street cleansing services were agreed by both Councils at the meetings of Cabinet and Executive on 25th October 2022 and are considered fit for purpose. However minor updates will be required to support the transition to extended frequency residual waste collections by supporting increased recycling. The new proposed policy statements are included in Appendix 2.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Cabinet has authority under 5.7.15 To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council. Any Executive function may be exercised by the Leader, Executive Member with a relevant delegation or officer. Overall non-Executive functions must be delegated via Full Council (as demonstrated via section 14 of the Constitution).

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 In general, it is expected that the ongoing costs of these proposals will be in line with existing costs, although there will be costs that are currently paid for within the waste contract (e.g. customer service costs and transaction processing costs) that move to being directly funded by the Council. There are likely to be some transition costs, which are difficult to estimate at this stage. It may be possible for these to be funded from the waste reserve, although that will depend on other calls on that funding source. The situation in relation to Digital Services is more uncertain, as a review of current and proposed processes will need to be carried out to determine the extent to which process automation can be achieved. Process automation may result in a change from staffing costs to IT costs.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There is a risk that each Council may progress with digital online self-serve at different speeds and that full integration may not be ready by 2025. This is being mitigated by early communication between all stakeholders.

11.2 There is a risk that integrated online self-serve will be cost prohibitive which would put additional pressure on the customer service teams.

11.3 There is a risk that the councils will have insufficient resources in corporate support services such as IT and finance to support the changes necessary for 2025. This is being mitigated by early communication between all stakeholders. Additional consultancy support is being consider for IT.

11.4 There is a risk that the two garden waste portals will not be integrated into the financial management systems at each authority in time for the next subscription year and that income will not come direct to the councils. This risk is mitigated by the option to use a direct debit bureau in a similar way to how Urbaser do currently.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 With an increased push towards digital services there is a risk of digital exclusion for some residents. However, one of the primary focuses of the digitisation project is to ensure that phone lines are available for customers who are not able or confident enough to use online services.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Additional pressure will be put on existing staff to develop new processes and systems. No additional resource is proposed and this is linked to the risk identified in 11.3.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference for Joint Working Group and Aims and Principles of the Shared Waste Service
Appendix 2 – Proposed Waste Policy Documents for 2025
Appendix 3 – Scoping work for Digital IT integration work
Appendix 4 – Details of options appraisals presented to Partnership Board

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 *Chloe Hipwood, Shared Service Manager – Waste Management chloe.hipwood@north-herts.gov.uk ext. 4304*

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 22nd March, 2022, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 25th October, 2022, 6.00 pm | North Herts Council (north-herts.gov.uk)

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Terms of Reference – Waste Cross Party Joint Working Group

1. Identify the core aims and priorities in terms of service performance, identifying our current performance levels and how these are benchmarked, considering the long-term objectives of both Councils.
2. Consider the impending changes to legislation, including environmental and financial pressures. Reviewing the current service design in relation to these factors.
3. Identify best practice and where opportunities may exist to transition towards best practice where this is both financially and environmentally sustainable.
4. Seek to achieve consensus and greater consistency of services endeavouring to benefit from greater stability and efficiencies from a common contract.
5. Identify opportunities for financial efficiencies and cost reduction in service design and delivery.
6. Consider and identify the optimal long term service design options for the Councils and how these will deliver the Councils objectives and aims and principles of the shared service.
7. Specifically, the working group will focus on:
    a. Customer Services
    b. Street Cleansing Non-Core Services
    c. Street Cleansing Core Services
    d. Waste & Recycling Non-Core Services e.g. textiles collections
    e. Waste and Recycling Core Services
    f. Chargeable Garden Waste Collections
    g. Chargeable Waste & Recycling Services

East Herts Council Priorities

- Sustainability at the heart of everything we do
    - We will make changes to how the council manages its own premises, people and services
    - We will use our regulatory powers to promote action by others
    - We will influence and encourage others to be more environmentally sustainable
- Enabling our communities
    - We will invest in our places
    - We will ensure all voices in the community are heard
    - We will support our vulnerable residents
- Encouraging economic growth
    - We will develop new sources of income
    - We will support business growth
    - We will create viable places
- Digital by Design
    - We will improve the customer experience for those who use council services
    - We will work with partners to ensure our communities are digitally enabled

North Herts Council Priorities

- People First - People make North Herts work. We value all our residents, businesses, staff, contractors, councillors, and other partners, and place them at the heart of everything we do.
- Sustainability - We recognise the challenges our towns and district face and are committed to delivering services which are relevant and sustainable. In doing so we will place our environmental responsibilities, as well as sound financial planning, at the centre of our policy making.
- A brighter future together - We are far-sighted and plan for the long term to secure the best outcomes for our people, towns and villages, and the local economy, ensuring North Herts continues to thrive.

Waste Shared Service Aim

Delivering high quality and well performing services which are both financially and environmentally sustainable.

Waste Shared Service Principles

a. Maintain and/or improve service standards through efficient working.
b. Achieve service improvements, greater resilience, efficiencies, cost reductions or better performance through service alignment
c. Deliver service changes aligned with the government's Resources and Waste Strategy which demonstrate a net environmental benefit
d. Work in partnership with contractors to develop and evolve a carbon management plan identifying how operations can deliver year on year carbon savings and move towards services with net zero carbon emissions.
e. Improve efficiencies and enhance the offering for chargeable waste and recycling services and explore commercial opportunities
f. Work in partnership with contractors to explore new opportunities to reduce costs and ensure the delivery of financially sustainable services
g. Providing residents and customers with improved and enhanced online self-serve opportunities delivering any service changes with this in mind
h. Work in partnership with contractors to improve and modernise working practices and make our services an attractive place to work
i. Work with the Herts Waste Partnership and other partners to share knowledge, best practice, reduce waste and embed circular economy principles in service delivery.

WASTE & RECYCLING COLLECTION & STREET CLEANSING POLICY STATEMENTS

POLICY DESCRIPTION **PAGE**

Domestic Waste Collection Service Policy Statements

1. Standard service for individual houses
2. Variations from the standard service
3. Multi-occupancy properties (flats blocks etc.)
4. Mixed Domestic / Commercial properties (Mixed hereditament properties)
5. Number of sacks provided
6. Extra bin capacity
7. Items prohibited from domestic wheeled bins / sacks
8. Excess waste/ side waste
9. Bin lids
10. Rejected/ contaminated wheeled bins and sacks
11. Collection day and time
12. Collection point for wheeled bins/ sacks
13. Return of bins
14. Missed collections
15. Assisted collections
16. Frozen compostable waste bins
17. Overweight wheeled bins and sacks
18. Ownership of wheeled bins/sacks
19. Provision of new / replacement wheeled bins
20. Lost or stolen wheeled bins
21. Damaged wheeled bins
22. Sharing wheeled bins
23. Severe weather
24. Access issues
25. Healthcare and Clinical waste
26. Bulky waste collections

Trade Waste Collection Service Policy Statements

27. Trade refuse and recycling collection material streams
28. Trade refuse and recycling collection bin sizes

Street Cleansing Policy Statements

29. Standard of Service
30. Response times
31. Leaf clearance
32. High speed roads
33. Street Cleansing Town centres
34. Litter Bins
35. Winter snow clearance

36. Events and street parties
37. Graffiti and fly-poster removal

DOMESTIC WASTE COLLECTION SERVICE POLICY STATEMENTS

Policy 1 - Standard service for individual houses

The standard service for the collection of residual domestic waste is a three weekly service. Mixed dry recycling and paper will be collected fortnightly, in separate containers. Food waste is collected separately, weekly. Each property on the standard service will receive only one bin of each type.

Residents also have the option of paying for a fortnightly collection of garden waste. This collection will occur during the same week as the recycling is collected. Each household can pay a subscription charge for a maximum of two additional bins for garden waste.

Each Council has historical bin colours; the list below represents the standard service for new houses and the colour of any replacement bins.

The bins provided are as follows:

Container	Material	Frequency
180L purple lidded with grey body bin (replacements purple lidded)	Residual waste (waste which cannot be recycled)	Three Weekly
240L blue lidded with grey body bin	Mixed dry recycling*	Fortnightly
55 L blue box	Paper	Fortnightly
23L brown caddy	Food waste *	Weekly
240L brown lidded bin (chargeable opt in service)	Garden waste*	Fortnightly

*As defined by our current acceptance criteria stated on our website

The correct bin must be used for the different types of waste. Exemptions to the standard service may be made subject to certain criteria (see Policy 2). Where a property is provided with the standard service, only waste presented in wheeled bins provided by the Council will be collected with the exceptions under Policy 8.

Policy 2 – Variations from the standard service

To qualify for an exemption from the standard service you must meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. There is no reasonable rear or side access to the property and the useable off street frontage is too small to accommodate the bins (see Policy 5)
2. The property is accessed via steep inclines or steps, so making it impractical to use wheeled bins (see Policy 5)
3. The property is a flat (see Policy 3)
4. The household is a House in Multiple Occupation or has a large number of residents eg. Student house. (see Policy 6)

5. The household/s are disabled or elderly and cannot manoeuvre wheeled bins. (see Policy 15)
6. The household produces clinical waste (see Policy 25)
7. The household produces large quantities of hygiene waste, e.g. nappies or incontinence pads (see Policy 6 and Policy 25)
8. Any other exceptional circumstance as agreed by the council

Policy 3 - Multi-occupancy properties (Communal/ flat blocks etc.)

Properties such as flats or accommodation blocks will normally be collected using communal wheeled bins wherever possible. The number of bins provided will depend on the size and number of properties.

Where bins cannot be provided, for example flats above shops, sacks for residual waste will be provided for use and boxes will be provided for dry recycling. Residents will be provided with the quantities of sacks as detailed in Policy 5.

Bins will be collected from the bin storage or other area as agreed by the Council and returned to the collection location. The standard collection cycle is fortnightly, however weekly collections for residual waste will be facilitated for some existing flat blocks where bin storage space is insufficient.

Only waste which is presented in the correct containers with the correct items in will be collected. For multi-occupancy properties, where the bin is found to contain incorrect items, it will be rejected and not emptied.

It will be the responsibility of the residents / managing agents to arrange for the incorrect materials to be removed before the bin will be emptied on the next scheduled collection day. The Council may offer to empty the bins at it's discretion alongside the scheduled residual waste collection. Repeated incidents will result in charging for the emptying of contaminated bins. Only items detailed as acceptable items on our website will be collected.

No loose rubbish or sacks around the bins will be collected nor any other items; and it is the responsibility of the residents / managing agents to remove or clear any such items.

Where access to a bin is blocked with loose rubbish / sacks / flytipping it will not be emptied until this has been removed. The bin will then be collected on the next scheduled collection day.

Policy 4 – Mixed Domestic / Commercial Properties (Mixed hereditament properties)

Mixed hereditament properties are generally business properties with living accommodation attached e.g. a flat above a shop. Such properties will be provided with the standard service (Policy 1) unless an exemption/variation applies. The bins provided must not be used to dispose of business waste. Household bins containing commercial shall not be emptied.

Policy 5 - Number of sacks provided

If the property meets either Criteria 1 or 2 from Policy 2 the property will be provided with sacks for the collection of residual waste and a box for the collection of mixed dry recycling, a box for the collection of paper and a 23l caddy for food wasteNHDC.

Sacks are delivered annually. Sacks are predominantly collected fortnightly and a maximum of 4 sacks will be collected unless an exemption within Policy 6 applies.

In some circumstances flats will receive weekly residual waste collections. Properties must demonstrate they are adequately using recycling services to be considered for weekly residual waste collections.

Policy 6 – Extra bin capacity

All households will be provided with bins in accordance with the standard service. Residents can apply for additional capacity for residual waste under the following circumstances.

1. There are six or more permanent residents in the household
2. There are two or more children in nappies
3. A household where a large quantity of non-clinical healthcare (hygiene) waste is being produced

All households that request additional capacity will need to meet one or more of the set criteria. If the application is under Criterion 1 or 2 above, a five-week diary shall be completed by the household, to ensure items are correctly being separated for recycling and a waste audit may then be carried out to determine whether additional capacity is necessary. This is to ensure that households are recycling all that they can.

Capacity requirements are reviewed periodically (usually annually) and additional bins are provided on a conditional basis. Households will revert back to the standard service when the criteria no longer applies.

If additional capacity is authorised due to Criteria 2 above then there must be two or more children in nappies under the age of 36 months

Under Criteria 1: If a household is placing out a significant amount of extra recycling each collection, they may be considered for a larger recycling bin or second recycling bin at the Councils discretion.

Extra capacity provision under Criteria 3 is subject to a referral from a healthcare provider.

Policy 7 - Items prohibited from domestic wheeled bins / sacks

The following items are prohibited from all bins, this list is not exhaustive:-

- Any hazardous waste or chemicals
- Any clinical waste
- Paint/ Pesticides or chemicals
- DIY waste
- Plasterboard
- Electrical and electronic equipment
- Commercial waste
- Industrial waste
- Large or bulky waste which does not normally fit into a bin.(see Policy 26)
- Hot ashes
- Car parts
- Rubble / soil

- Corrosive materials and liquids
- Oil
- Fluorescent tubes / low energy light bulbs

An A-Z of recycling is provided on our website for information on what can be recycled at the kerbside and items which can be recycled at Household Waste Recycling Centres.

Policy 8 – Excess waste / Side waste

Excess residual waste beside or piled on top of the residual domestic wheeled bin will not be taken. Where possible excess waste will be placed back inside the bin after it has been emptied, a sticker informing the resident may also be left. Persistent excess residual waste may result in a letter being sent or an officer visit to advise on the management of waste. Excess waste can be taken to the nearest Household Waste Recycling Centre alternatively the resident can pay for a bulky waste collection see Policy 26.
Where bins have been forcibly compacted or are frozen and the contents is stuck in the bin, residents are required to loosen the contents. The bin will then be collected on the next scheduled collection day. No return will be made under Policy 14.

Excess waste will not be collected with brown bins with the exception of real Christmas trees, which should be left next to the brown bin in January following the Christmas service suspension. This is for residents who have signed up to the chargeable garden waste service only.

Additional dry recycling materials for the mixed dry recycling bin will be collected as long as these are contained in a paper bag, cardboard box or reusable plastic box. Non-recyclable containers will be left after collection. Large item such as cardboard from large electrical goods must be broken down to facilitate collection. Excess recyclable material will not be collected if presented in a black or other type of plastic sack.

Excess paper can be placed next to the box in a paper bag or reusable plastic box.

Policy 9 – Bin Lids

Wheeled bins will only be collected if the bin lid is closed otherwise it will not be emptied. This is due to Health and Safety considerations and to limit the potential for waste to fall or blow out of the bin. See Policy 8 for the management of additional waste.

Policy 10 - Rejected / contaminated wheeled bins, boxes and sacks

Where wheeled bins are found to be contaminated, residents may be notified by means of a sticker or hanger placed on the relevant bin requiring them to remove the incorrect material and dispose of it in a responsible manner. Boxes and sacks will have a sticker placed on them if possible. Once the incorrect material has been removed from the bin or box they will be collected on the next scheduled collection date for that material. We will not return to empty the bin, box or collect the sack before the next scheduled collection date.

For communal properties it is the responsibility of managing agents to resolve issues of contamination in bins. The Council may, at its discretion, offer a chargeable service for this.

Policy 11 - Collection day & time

The bins/sacks/boxes must be available at the collection point by 6.30am on the day of collection for all residents.

During periods of high temperatures in the summer months, collections may begin at 6am following notification via social media.

Policy 12 - Collection point for wheeled bins / sacks

Receptacles should be presented at the kerbside. Where this is not possible due to wheeled bins blocking footpaths they should be presented at the edge of the property, where the property meets the public highway. If properties are located down a private driveway/road then the bins must be presented where the private access road / driveway meets the public highway.

In a small number of cases e.g farms, due to the access or location of a property it may not be possible for residents to place bins near the public highway for collection. Each case will be looked at on an individual basis to agree a suitable collection point as close as possible to a vehicle access point on the highway.

Where the collection vehicle has to travel over a private / road drive we will not be liable for any damage due to wear and tear to the road surface from normal collection operations as the roadway is unlikely to have been built to sufficient highway standards.

Policy 13 - Return of bins

Bins will be returned to the collection point where possible or another safe place within a reasonable distance to the property and should be removed by the householder as soon as reasonably/practicable after the collection has been made. Bins should not be left obstructing driveways or the public footpath.

Where a bin store has been provided the bins will be returned to the bin store.

Policy 14 - Missed collections

We will only return for a reported missed collection in the following circumstances

- The bin, box or sack was placed out before 6.30am
- The correct collection point was used, and;
- It has not been reported as contaminated or containing prohibited waste by collection crew;
- A crew report has not been received regarding the bin e.g. heavy, excessive waste
- In the case of assisted collections (see Policy 15) there were no access issues e.g. gate unlocked

A missed collection must be reported within 48 hours of your normal scheduled day of collection. Any missed collections reported after this time will not be collected until the next scheduled collection day.

In –cab crew reports will be used to determine whether a return will be made and vehicle CCTV may be used where reports are of a recurring nature.

Policy 15 - Assisted collections

Assisted collections are available to anyone with a mobility problem where no-one in the household is able to take the bins to the normal collection point (see Policy 12).

The collection team will collect the waste or recycling from its agreed 'normal storage point', empty the container and return it back to the householder's storage point.

Where bins/boxes/sacks are placed out for collection at a location not designated as the agreed 'normal storage point' receptacles may be returned to the location that they were found.

The bins/boxes/sacks must be easily accessible for the crews, and collection vehicle. Gates must be left unlocked where necessary and the crew should be easily able to manoeuvre the bins from the property. Please ensure there are no overhanging branches or shrubs as we may be collecting in the dark. Wherever possible the bins should be stored at the front of the property to enable easy collection and collection should avoid steps and gravel drives.

Where a property on an assisted collection is located a long way from the public highway on a private driveway / road the vehicle may need to access the property where it is not suitable for our crews to walk to collect the waste. In these circumstances we will not be responsible for damage cause to road surfaces through normal collection operations.

Checks may be carried out by the Council from time to time on resident's suitability for the collection and evidence requested from the householder. Any change in circumstance must be notified to the council as soon as possible.

Policy 16 – Frozen waste bins

During winter months organic waste can become frozen in the bin, if the waste does not empty when lifted by the vehicle mechanism; the bin will be left with the contents still in it. A sticker or hanger may be left to indicate the reason for non-collection. The resident should ensure that the waste is loosened within the bin when presenting it for collection on their next scheduled collection day. We will not return to empty frozen bins before the next scheduled collection.

Policy 17 - Overweight wheeled bins and sacks

Where a crew member cannot safely manoeuvre and position a wheeled bin, sack or box onto the vehicle, or where the vehicle cannot lift the bin due to its weight, then it will be left un-emptied and reported by the collection crew. By law all the vehicle bin lifts have a safe working weight limit which crews cannot override. Bins containing the correct items (see website and Policy 7) will rarely be overweight.

Sacks should be liftable with one hand. When collecting sacks the employee will assess the weight of the bag. If this is too heavy to carry safely to the vehicle, the bag is likely to split or if the employee cannot safely lift it into the vehicle it will not be collected.

Where any bin, box or sack is found to be too heavy the householder will be required to remove sufficient material from the bin/sack and dispose of it in a responsible manner. Once sufficient weight has been removed, the bin or sack should be presented on the next scheduled collection date. We will not return to empty the bin or collect the sack before the next scheduled collection date.

Policy 18 - Ownership of wheeled bins / sacks

All wheeled bins and sacks provided remain the property of the Council and should be left at the property when moving out, with the exception of additional purchased garden

waste bins where the subscription is being moved to another property in East or North Hertfordshire.

For households with a larger bin (see Policy 6) for residual domestic waste it is necessary to notify the waste department at the Council when the property is vacated.

Wheeled bins and sacks provided must only be used for the collection of waste and recycling.

The householder is responsible for keeping the bins / sacks safe whilst they are on their property and to protect them from misuse. The Council will not clean or wash bins.

Policy 19 - Provision of new/replacement wheeled bins

Bins will not usually be put on our delivery schedule until the property is occupied and registered with Council Tax.

At a property where the previous occupier has not left the bins, the Council must be contacted to arrange delivery of a set of bins. There is a charge for residual waste (purple lidded) and garden waste (brown lidded) bins.

The delivery of bins will usually be within two weeks but can take up to six weeks.

Policy 20 – Lost and stolen wheeled bins

If you suspect your bin has been lost please check the surrounding area before requesting a new bin. You must contact us to request a replacement bin. Waste not contained within the specified receptacles will not be collected.
For residual waste bins and garden waste bins there is a charge for replacements. Therefore if the bin has been stolen a crime reference number should be provided.

Policy 21 - Damaged wheeled bins

If the bin has been damaged or ‘eaten’ by the collection vehicle the collection crew will report it on their in-cab reporting system and a new bin will automatically be delivered, and a notification will be left.

In some instances damage through general wear and tear such as broken lids or wheels can be repaired and the Council endeavours to reduce waste by repairing rather than replacing bins where possible. Replacement bins may be provided when they are damaged, any damage should be reported to the Council and details provided to facilitate a repair or replacement bin. Replacement mixed dry recycling bins are provided free of charge. Replacement garden waste bins and residual waste bins are provided at a charge to cover the cost of delivery. Replacement bins or boxes can be ordered online.

A replacement may be a refurbished bin.

Policy 22 - Sharing wheeled bins

If residents request to do so, then they may share bins with their neighbour if both are in agreement. One resident must claim overall responsibility for the bin as a bin can only be allocated to one address; this is usually the property where the bins are stored. It is the responsibility of the householder if a bin is contaminated, misused or needs replacing.

Policy 23 - Severe weather

During severe weather we will

- Continue to undertake the regular scheduled collection of waste wherever it is deemed safe to do so. The decision on whether it is safe for a refuse collection vehicle to access a specific location/street has to be determined locally by the driver of that vehicle. Among key factors that apply are: road conditions, weather conditions, access past parked cars, risks to the safety of public and the crew, risks of damage to parked cars or property.
- Services may be either delayed, suspended or cancelled depending on the severity of the disruption.
- We will attempt to return and collect bins as soon as possible after the scheduled collection date. If this is not possible due to continuing bad weather conditions or compacted ice and snow it may be necessary to cancel services for that collection.
- Collections during or following weather disruption often take more time leading to further delays and therefore some services may be prioritised over others, for example high volume waste streams like recycling or putrescible waste streams like food waste.

All service disruption details and any alternative arrangements will be communicated via our website and on social media, this may change and be updated daily.

No council tax refunds or refunds for garden waste services will be issued as a result of adverse weather disruption to services.

Policy 24 - Access Issues

If access to a road is blocked by parked cars or road works collections will be attempted on two consecutive days following the scheduled day of collection.

Parked cars blocking access will have a letter, card or sticker attached to the windscreen.

Where access has, on a number of occasions, been attempted to collect waste but vehicles were unable to do so for reasons such as parked cars. We may notify the Police. Collections will resume on the next scheduled day.

If we are notified of road works in advance alternative arrangements may be arranged and communicated to residents.

Policy 25 – Healthcare and clinical waste

Offensive / hygiene waste

The Council does not offer a separate collection for low grade non-clinical healthcare (offensive / hygiene) waste such as incontinence pads, nappies, feminine hygiene products etc, from a person with a non-infectious condition. This waste should ideally be double wrapped and placed in the non-recyclable (residual waste) wheeled bin. Where a large quantity is being produced then the household may be eligible for a larger residual waste wheeled bin under Policy 6.

Clinical waste - Infectious or hazardous waste including Sharps

Sharps such as needles must never be placed in wheeled bins or sacks but disposed of in special sharps boxes and can be returned to the doctors surgery/ hospital or

residents can have a special collection. Clinical waste collections of sharps are made in yellow sharps boxes on a call and collect basis.

Clinical waste collections for infectious waste in most cases are considered temporary and are periodically reviewed.

Patients producing infectious or hazardous waste must have a referral form from their healthcare provider.

Which of the services above are provided will be based on the information provided by the resident and their healthcare professional.

Policy 26 – Bulky waste collections

Where a household has bulky household waste e.g. a sofa or large Waste Electronic or Electrical Equipment e.g. a fridge for disposal these can be taken to the nearest Household Waste Recycling Centre.

It is advised that for bulky household waste in good condition charities or reuse organisations should be contacted initially.

Bulky household waste collections made by the Council are charged and will be collected only upon receipt of the relevant payment. These collections will be made at a different time to normal waste collections and the items should be placed outside for collection on the notified day.

The Council is required to collect soft furnishings separately from other bulky waste items and therefore where residents require a collection of mixed items two separate collections will need to be booked and paid for.

Items should be stored in a clean and dry location prior to collection, and placed at the kerbside by 7am, as the Council may reuse or recycle the items where possible.

We do not make collections from inside the property.

TRADE WASTE POLICIES

Policy 27 – Trade refuse and recycling collection material streams

The Council can provide chargeable collections upon request for residual trade waste, mixed dry recycling, separate paper, garden waste and/or food waste. Waste must be contained within the receptacles provided and payment must be made in advance.

Bins which are contaminated or contain prohibited items will not be collected.

Contaminated bins can be emptied as residual waste for an additional charge.

Policy 28 – Trade refuse and recycling collection bin sizes

Collections can be arranged for the following bin sizes provided they are in stock.

- 140L
- 240L
- 360L^
- 660L**^
- 1100L**^

**Not suitable for paper only collections.
^Not suitable for food waste collections.

All bins and sacks remain the property of the Council and will be collected at the end of a contract or on non payment of outstanding invoices.

Terms and conditions and further service information is available on our website.

STREET CLEANSING POLICIES

Policy 29 – Standard of Service

The majority of street cleansing operations are undertaken on a needs basis and in accordance with zoning outlined in the Code of Practice for Litter and Refuse. Some cleansing occurs on a regular cleansing cycle and where standards of cleanliness have been identified to have fallen to a Grade C between the scheduled cleanse or litter pick, they will be returned to Grade A in accordance with the response times outlined on our website or in accordance with Policy 30.

Policy 30 – Response times

Any highway cleansing schedules have been devised on needs-based cleansing frequencies according to their intensity of use and using guidelines in the Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse. Further details are available on our website.

Fly-tipping will be removed within 2 working days of the report and following any investigation by enforcement teams. Where hazardous waste is identified in the fly tip a specialist contractor is required to remove waste and therefore removal may be up to 10 working days.

Heavily littered and 'hotspot' areas which are categorised as Grade C or D will be cleaned of litter on receipt of reports or as a result of inspections by Council staff in accordance with the response times.

In town centres which are cleansed in accordance with Policy 33, response times are usually within 3 working hours.

In other areas with very high footfall this is usually withing 1 working day.

For the majority of other urban areas this is usually within 3 working days.

For rural area this is between 3 and 14 days.

Overflowing litterbins will be responded to within 24 hours.

Reported needles will be collected the same working day.

Policy 31 – Leaf clearance

In some areas, separate leaf clearance work will be undertaken as required in high leaf fall streets across the districts to maintain the safe use of highway footpaths. All other leaf clearance will be undertaken alongside the scheduled cleanse, typically a minimum of every six weeks.

Leaf clearance work will only be prioritised when there is a potential problem for drainage in roads identified as liable to flooding.

Policy 32 – High speed roads

High speed roads requiring traffic management and road or lane closures to cleanse and litter pick safely will be mechanically swept at least once a year. The majority of litter picking is done during the spring and summer months alongside grass cutting as this collaborative working reduces the costs to the tax payer.

Laybys and safely accessible areas will be litter picked as required, this is often done at the same time as litter bin emptying. Any requests for additional cleansing where standards have fallen to a grade C in safely accessible areas will usually be rectified within 7 working days.

Policy 33 – Street cleansing Town centres

Town centres will receive a daily litter pick service. The areas of the town centres experiencing the highest intensity of traffic will be maintained to a Grade A standard between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday and 8am and 12noon on Sundays, with the exception of Christmas Day and New Year's Day.

Policy 34 - Litter / on street recycling bins

Litter bins are to be used for small items of rubbish derived from passers by only.

Bagged dog faeces can be placed into street litter bins. Household and commercial waste should not be placed into on street bins. Waste should be placed inside the bin, not next to or on top of it.

If a stub plate is present, the extinguished cigarette should then be disposed in the bin.

Where recycling bins are present, only the correct materials as stated on the bins should be placed within them.

Where litter bins are not present or are full; litter should be taken home.

Policy 35 – Winter snow clearance

Winter snow clearance and gritting frozen or icy roads or footpaths is the responsibility of the landowner. For roads and footpaths which form part of the highway this is the responsibility of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).

Gritting will be undertaken when necessary on Council owned land such as car parks.

Policy 36 – Events and street parties

Additional cleansing support can be provided where necessary for events and street parties. It is the responsibility of the event organisers to liaise with the cleansing team about these requirements and the cost of additional services will be recovered from the organisers.

Policy 37 – Graffiti and fly-poster removal

Response times for the removal of reported offensive graffiti and reported offensive fly-posting, on Council property, will be in accordance with the recommendations in the Code of Practice for Litter and Refuse.
In addition officers will work with private property owners to encourage the removal of graffiti.
Further details are provided on our website

Scope for IT integration Project Work

Aim

To allow residents to log all standard service requests online, automating processes, with full integration with the back-office waste management IT system, wherever possible.

Overview

The waste collection and street cleansing contract is being reprocured and a new contract will go live at the beginning of May 2025. As part of this procurement the successful contractor will be required to provide a waste management IT system capable of managing the day-to-day logistics of services with open APIs to allow for integration with Council CRM systems. Although we do not yet know which waste management IT system will be in use from 2025, each operate in a similar way and all will be able to manage the simple day to day processes utilising key information captured at point of contact.

This project is essentially two projects, one on behalf of East Herts Council and one on behalf of North Herts Council. It will be necessary for the set up for each Council to be the same in terms of information captured and fed into the waste management IT system. Where processes are currently different it is expected that the most efficient, best practice process will be taken forwards.

Each of the projects should operate in phases these phases will be based on the highest contacts ad existing online functionality.

At this stage it is proposed that the bespoke garden waste portals are out of scope of this project, due to the quantity of work necessary prior to the contract start. This is subject to the successful novation of the existing contracts. Separate projects exist to integrate the payment portal with the Councils financial management and payment systems to ensure that income generated from garden waste can come directly to the Councils rather than via Urbaser (or any future contractor). However, this will be kept under review and subject to comment by IT teams.

Client Team Timeline

It is necessary for integrated online reporting to be functioning for the waste contract start in May 2025. This is to prevent unnecessary impacts and delays managing resident contacts during mobilisation, should the services experience disruption during mobilisation.

It is anticipated that we will know which waste management IT system will be used as part of the contract in early in 2024.

We do not yet know when we will have access to API data, but this is unlikely to be earlier than 3 months prior to contract start.

It will be necessary to undertake user testing in April 2024.

It is necessary to determine whether IT teams and transformation teams will have sufficient resource at the critical time to fully develop the necessary integrations.

Risks

Failure to complete this project on time will have significant resource impacts on the customer service teams and waste shared service client team. No additional resources are planned to manage contacts which have not been adequately integrated with the waste management IT system.

Data

The shared client team have access to analytical information on contacts by type and requirements around SLAs this can be provided on request.

As a guide: -

During the first 3 months of the current contract the service logged 26,200 contacts, with many additional reports going unlogged as people could not get through on phones and reports of multiple contacts where emails were sent, and residents were unsure if action was being taken. It is vital that we ensure we are better able to manage contacts for the 2025 contract change and well established and robust online reporting tools is the primary means of doing this. Additional staff resource may also be necessary but will never be able to manage the volume of contacts that online reporting could. The waste client team is keen to reduce the burden of emails coming into customer services as this lengthens the response time to contacts.

The average number of contacts logged each month in 2022/23 was 5200, excluding garden waste subscriptions.

The month with the highest contacts is April.

The top 10 contacts in 22/23 (excluding garden waste subscriptions) are: _

1. Replacement bin/box – 19,677
2. Adhoc clinical sharps collection – 5,151
3. Missed - NORTH - Recycling Collection – 2,722
4. Missed - EAST – Recycling Collection – 2,555
5. Missed - EAST - Refuse Collection – 2,428
6. EAST – Standard Property Bin Delivery – 1,973
7. EAST - Bulky Waste Collection – 1,796
8. NORTH – Bulky Waste Collection – 1,569
9. Missed - NORTH –Food Waste Collection – 1,497
10. Missed – North - Refuse Collection – 1,416

One off payment integration is required for the following: -

1. Bulky waste collections
2. Request a new or replacement bin – (residual waste bins only)
3. Request commercial sacks

Proposed Online Form Development

Phase 1 of each project should consist of integrating the following; which are existing: -

1. Bin collection day look up
2. Report missed collection
3. Request a new or replacement bin/sacks

Phase 2 of each project should consist of integrating the following: -

1. Report overflowing litter bin
2. Report need for street cleansing (lots of categories here)
3. Report fly tipping
4. Request bulky waste collection

5. Apply for assisted bin collection
6. Apply for additional capacity
7. Report graffiti
8. Register community litter picking event
9. Request clearance of community litter picked waste
10. Request clinical waste collections
11. Request adhoc collection of sharps
12. Report abandoned bin
13. Report staff behaviour
14. Report damage to litter bin

Phase 3 of each project should consist of integrating the following (commercial waste elements are dependent on IT solution and it may be possible to develop alongside similar household services): -

1. Commercial waste missed collections
2. Commercial waste bin replacements
3. Commercial waste contract amendments
4. Request adhoc or event commercial collection
5. Request review of collection arrangements
6. Request commercial sacks
7. Report damage to property
8. Litter bin request

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Customer Services

Contacts for waste and street cleansing services makes up a significant proportion of contacts via customer service teams for each local authority (either directly or indirectly), with around 36,000 contacts being handled by the call centres and approximately a further 19,000 contacts being managed by self-service online forms which directly integrate into the waste management IT system. The sheer volume of work completed (14.4 million bin collections annually) means that even in high performing services, service requests regarding service problems like missed collections are inevitable. Contacts can range from general basic interactions and questions (not recorded in the waste management IT system), service requests such as requests for new bins, through to complex complaints. The current provision for the service is split with NHDC waste customer service handled by the contractor and EHC handled by the corporate customer service centre (CSC). Following member workshops, the Executive/Cabinet agreed to keep services in-house for EHC and bring services in house from NHDC. The decision now needs to be whether this is:

1. Two separate CSCs one for each authority
2. NHDC leading on CSC on behalf of EHC
3. EHC leading on CSC on behalf of NHDC

Customer Services Options Appraisal

Option	**1 (separate)**	**2 (NHDC)**	**3 (EHC)**
Reputational	☑Retain control of messaging to residents ☑ Consistency with corporate CSC 'look and feel' ☒ That standards and performance is different for each authority.	☒Potential loss of control over messaging to staff and residents ☑Consistency of messaging across shared service ☒Residents unable to understand the relationship with other council and deferring to own council.	☒Potential loss of control over messaging to staff and residents ☑Consistency of messaging across shared service ☒Residents unable to understand the relationship with other council and deferring to own council.
Financial	☑ No additional financial pressure for EHC ☒Potential financial pressure for NHDC with contractor staff being TUPE'd over, they would be entitled to LGPS	☒Potential additional pressure following TUPE of staff from contractor ☑ Potentially reduced staff costs over 1 due to economies of scale.	☒Additional cost burden to EHC albeit a recharge to NHDC ☑ Potentially reduced staff costs over 1 due to economies of scale.

	☒IT system integration and set up likely more costly than 2 or 3 due to being required twice. ☑ Allows each authority to invest and progress with their transformation programmes as scheduled	☒ No reduction in overheads ☒ EHC transformation project becomes less financially viable. ☒Potential VAT issues when taking payments if using one FMS ☒ Additional costs for IT integration for existing and new online services ☒ Access to two payments systems needed as income is to be managed by separate authorities.	☒ Unlikely reduction in overheads ☒Potential VAT issues when taking payments if using one FMS ☒ Additional costs for IT integration for existing and new online services ☒ Access to two payments systems needed as income is to be managed by separate authorities.
Legal	☑ No additional GDPR arrangements required	TUPE Would require changes to the Data sharing agreement ☒Potential licencing issues for software	TUPE Would require changes to the Data sharing agreement ☒Potential licencing issues for software
Operational	☑ opportunity to align processes between two CSCs under council control whilst retaining sovereignty ☒potential for Inconsistencies in online offering due to commitments of transformation programme of resources	☑Customer service staff for contractor will be TUPE'd over from contractor, detail operational knowledge passing from contractor ☒Training required for rest of CSC staff	☑ CSC contractor staff transferring already trained.

On balance the recommendation would be to retain ownership of customer contact handling and customer services, to ensure the delivery of this element of the service is in line with each Authorities priorities. In East Herts, there is also an additional driver due to the investment in a new customer management relationship (CRM) system, the council would achieve a greater return by retaining waste transactions. This allows the benefits of the council's transformation programme to be realised.

As each authority has also identified that it is preferable to manage their own income (see Section 5); it would also present additional challenges for customer services to be provided by one authority, as two payment systems would need to be accessible to a joint customer service team. This also has further additional implications for digital services.

The waste client team and transformation teams will facilitate a cross council business process mapping exercise to align processes.

Digital Services

A number of services are already available online with full integration with back office systems including:

- Reporting missed bin collections (approximately 50% recorded online)
- Subscribing to garden waste services (over 80% online)
- New and replacement bin requests
- Collection day look up

There are a number of other services which can be reported online, however these webforms result in an email being sent either to customer service teams or the client team and therefore are not currently fully integrated.

All current fully integrated online services are provided as part of the waste contract. These online facilities will cease to function at the end of April 2025 and a new alternative solution is required to provide a seamless transition for residents. Subject to the recommendation for customer services being agreed, the following options will be considered:

- Online digital services delivered by each authority
- NHDC lead
- EHC lead
- Hybrid (option only available if both Councils utilise same CRM systems)

The hybrid approach being one where one authority leads on the development of all online integrations necessary (to reduce development costs) but each Councils sets up web forms in their own CRM system.

Options Appraisal Digital Services

Option	**1 (separate)**	**2 (NHDC)**	**3 (EHC)**
Reputational	☒ potential inconsistencies in the delivery timeframes for each authority. ☑ Delivery in line with corporate priorities ☑ Look and feel consistent with individual Council websites.	☒no current corporate steer for full integration of web forms	☒Some delay in implementing new online options already experienced due to IT resource levels
Financial	☑ Cost of integration development would be covered by each authority providing flexibility to do more or less if needed	☑Cost of development integration could be reduced	☑Cost of development integration could be reduced

	☒Duplicated costs for the provision of garden waste portal ☒Integration expensive, particularly if consultants are engaged	☒Viability of EHC transformation programme reduced ☒Integration expensive, particularly if consultants are engaged	☒Integration expensive, particularly if consultants are engaged
Legal		☒Potential software licencing issues	☒Potential software licencing issues
Operational	☑ability to prioritise resources and expertise ☒ existing services not being delivered in new contract ☒ Twice the impact on the client team in terms of business process mapping and testing than option 2 or 3 ☒ Delivery timelines for each authority may differ, agreement would need to be sought to align timelines	☒ existing services not being delivered in new contract ☒ lack of available technical expertise to implement.	☒Currently not being delivered ☒ existing services not being delivered in new contract ☒ lack of available technical expertise to implement.

Neither authority has undertaken back-office integration with a CRM system and there is no permanent staff resource dedicated to this work at either authority. However, NHDC does now have an application development team who may be able to consider undertaking work on integration, subject to more detailed understanding of the work involved and timeframes.

Whilst it is still unknown whether both Councils will be utilising the same CRM systems it is not possible to consider the hybrid solution but this will be considered again should the Councils digital solutions be aligned.

There will be costs associated with the development for both authorities, which may be significant, should it be necessary to employ consultants to undertake the works. It is expected that estimated costs will be available for budget workshops in October.

Financial Management

Financial management is delivered separately for and by each authority creating a level of duplication, differing burdens and requirements for the client team. There is also a level of inconsistency in functionality i.e. NHDC can provide direct debits whilst currently EHC cannot, NHDC debtors processes are automated, while the EHC process is not.

The delivery of direct debits and automated debt management processes are anticipated to be delivered by November 2023 in EHC and with necessary real-world testing it is anticipated that direct debits for garden waste (circa 25,000) could be migrated to in-house systems by February 2024 in time for the next subscription year.

Secure card payment systems are being reprocured by EHC and the preferred supplier will be appointed via the Crown Commercial Services Framework in May and the system is anticipated to be delivered by November 2023. This would enable circa 8000 customers to be managed securely in-house in accordance with the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard and allow an end-to-end card payment integration on the web site.

NHDC are in the process of reprocuring and/or upgrading both the financial management system and payment system. Transition to in-house management of garden waste income is therefore not possible until this work is complete. For direct debits (circa 21000 customers) this is currently being investigated for an implementation for the next subscription year, however implementation by 2025 is necessary. For card payments (circa 8000 customers this is due by April 2024.

The move to in-house income management for garden waste is also dependent on successful integration with the existing garden waste portals and any subsequent re-procurement of these systems for each authority.

The options moving forward are:

1. Continue to deliver via current method, two separate authorities
2. NHDC lead
3. EHC lead

Options Appraisal Financial Management

Option	**1 (separate)**	**2 (NHDC)**	**3 (EHC)**
Reputational	☑ Clear to residents and businesses who they are transacting with ☒potential administration impacts during aligned garden waste subscription year	☒systems currently being reprocured	☒debt recovery not automated creating issues of businesses receiving services that aren't paid for and delays in management of debt ☒ currently no direct debit functionality for

			commercial waste nor garden waste
Financial	☑ ability to change GW charge annually without being charged by contractor, therefore reducing cost ☒Inconsistency in debt management	☒Additional cost burden to NHDC albeit a recharge to EHC, therefore increasing cost to EHC ☑ reduced staff costs over 1 due to economies of scale e.g. GW financial admin. ☒Additional income reconciliation necessary between authorities	☒Additional cost burden to EHC albeit a recharge to NHDC, therefore increasing cost to NHDC ☑ reduced staff costs over 1 due to economies of scale. ☒Debt recovery process currently inefficient and resulting in greater debt levels. ☒ No user tested DD system presents risks to GW service delivery. ☒Additional income reconciliation necessary between authorities
Legal		☒Potential VAT implications when operating as an agent on behalf of EHC	☒Potential VAT implications when operating as an agent on behalf of NHDC
Operational	☒Duplication of work and separate processes ☒Pinch point of additional admin in two systems in Jan/Feb/Mar for GW and trade waste administration.	☑ reduced administrative burdens ☒Higher levels of auditing from VAT.	☒Currently not in a position to deliver DD ☒Higher levels of auditing from VAT.

Both Councils have identified and acknowledge the additional administrative burden of some of the existing financial management processes. However, there are significant risks of one council operating on behalf of one another, including an additional auditing pressure related to VAT, as well significant income reconciliation impacts.

Spend on the contract will be presented to partnership board annually.

Communications and Marketing

Communications and marketing is delivered separately by each authority creating some inconsistencies in relation to corporate priorities of waste messages. The NHDC corporate service in terms of officer resource, is over twice the size of EHC, therefore there is potential benefit in aligning some aspects of comms.

The service changes will require a significant focus on comms with a need for additional resource to deliver more targeted campaign work. A new dedicated Waste Communications Officer post was identified and this role will focus on non-corporate communications, such are targeted communications in relation to specific campaigns, targeted local communications in relation to low performing areas and the capture of certain materials in the recycling streams. This will also include working with local schools and community groups for face-to-face communications.

The options moving forward are:

1. Continue to deliver via current method, two separate authorities
2. NHDC lead
3. EHC lead

Options Appraisal Communications and Marketing

Option	**1 (separate)**	**2 (NHDC)**	**3 (EHC)**
Reputational	☒Inconsistent messaging and design for the shared service ☒differing priorities from each council. ☑ Able to provide local focus for comms ☑Able to maintain corporate look and feel	☒branding and style may not be consistent with corporate style of other authority	☒branding and style may not be consistent with corporate style of other authority
Financial	☒Slightly increased costs where design work is duplicated and reduced economy of scale when printing. ☒Differences in budget impacts on time spent and value placed on comms		
Legal			Potential TUPE

Operational	☑ Comms more easily managed by CSC teams in line with corporate priorities ☑Local knowledge	☑dedicated corporate designer, more capacity within team	☒Reduced functionality following savings exercises

Legal Services

Both authorities have over the last year struggled to recruit contract and procurement lawyers. The current procurement is being delivered via an external provider at significant cost to each authority. Though as a temporary solution this has been beneficial it is not sustainable in the long term. A decision is needed on how to proceed with legal advice moving forward in relation to client relationship with the contractor. Each Council would be expected to seek their own advice on any matters relating to the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) or working relationship between the two authorities. The options as per other items are:

1. Retain external advice
2. NHDC lead
3. EHC lead

Options Appraisal Legal Services

Option	**1 (external)**	**2 (NHDC)**	**3 (EHC)**
Financial	☒Expensive outside of long term contractual arrangements	At cost recharges to other authority.	At cost recharges to other authority.
Legal	☒Reliance on external advice with minimal internal expertise to challenge	Each authority would need reassurance that the other authority's interests are well represented	Each authority would need reassurance that the other authority's interests are well represented
Operational	Consistent high quality advice provided in a timely manner	☒Ongoing recruitment and retention issues	☒Ongoing recruitment and retention issues

Governance

Historically, some decisions have been taken independently by each authority such as the implementation of a chargeable garden waste service. Given the commitment from both authorities to align services and create effective and efficient administrative processes as a result, it is necessary to review the governance arrangements. The options for governance are:

1. Retain model of partnership board and update the IAA
2. Delete the partnership board and introduce a formal Joint waste committee
3. Amendments to constitution and delegated decision making for officers to facilitate partnership arrangements with oversight by Partnership Board

Options Appraisal Governance

Option	**1 (current model)**	**2 Joint waste committee**	**3 Constitutional amendments**
Reputational	☑Political priorities maintained for each Council	☑Unified approach despite any political differences. ☑Leading the way in Herts ☒Potential for reduced political influence	☑Decision making consistent between authorities
Financial	☑ No financial changes or pressures	☒Potentially additional costs associated with administration of additional committees.	☑ No financial changes or pressures
Legal	☒ Potential for contractual and procurement complications if differing decisions made ☒ Only route for dispute management is utilising the collaboration agreement if differing decisions are made	☒Complex delegations required ☒Potential complexities around scrutiny	☒constitution changes required ☒Potential complexities around scrutiny
Operational	☒Currently no formal joint decision making	☑ no risk of differing decisions being made by either authority	☑ no risk of differing decisions being made by either authority

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CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ASHWELL CONSERVATION AREA

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the representations made in response to the consultation on the draft Ashwell Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) and the proposed boundary changes for the Ashwell Conservation Area.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the boundary changes to the Ashwell Conservation Area are approved and the new Ashwell conservation area is designated.

2.2. That the Ashwell CAAMP is approved and adopted.

2.3. That Officers are authorised to undertake the associated administrative tasks to finalise the designation of the Ashwell conservation area, outlined in paragraph 8.6.

2.4. That delegated authority is granted to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport to make any minor non-material corrections (including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations) to the CAAMP as considered necessary for the publication of the CAAMP.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To ensure that our Conservation Areas and historic assets within North Hertfordshire are appropriately assessed and designated to inform decision making for planning applications and in the preparation of neighbourhood plans and our Local Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Council could refrain from undertaking any further work on conservation areas or local heritage assets, but this would not reflect national policy or legislation which requires local authorities to review and monitor conservation areas from time to time and conserve local and designated assets.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Executive Members and Deputies have been briefed on the relevant matters in this report.

5.2. Public consultation took place on the proposed amendments to the Ashwell Conservation Area boundary and the draft CAAMP in June 2022. A summary of the responses is attached as Appendix A. Those responses have been considered and taken into account when finalising the proposed boundaries and the CAAMP.

5.3. Details of the responses received to the consultation are available on the Council's website and the Parish Council, the neighbourhood planning group and local ward councillor have all been informed of those responses.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Conservation areas are designated by the Council in its role as Local Planning Authority. They exist to manage and protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place. Local planning authorities have a duty to review past designations from time to time to determine if any further parts of the area should be included within conservation areas or no longer merit that designation.

7.2 Policy SP13 : Historic Environment in the Local Plan states that the Council will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and publication of detailed guidance. In paragraph 4.178 of the supporting text of that Policy it states that:

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.

7.3 Many of the District's conservation areas were designated in the 1960's and 1970's. Consultants were commissioned in 2019 to prepare character statements for the 33 conservation areas that were without information to support the designations. The final character statements were endorsed by Cabinet in January 2021 and are available to view of the Council's website. As part of that work, there were a number of recommendations for further areas of work, which included preparing a full conservation area appraisal and management plan for Ashwell.

7.4 The Council commissioned external consultants, Place Services, to prepare a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Ashwell and to recommend any boundary amendments to the Conservation Area.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Cabinet approved the draft CAAMP for Ashwell and a number of proposed boundary changes for public consultation in June 2022 with public consultation taking place between July and September 2022.

8.2. The consultation documents were placed on the Council's website, interested parties were contacted and a consultation event was held in the village with the consultants available to answer questions. The Parish Council also helped publicise the consultation period to local residents.

8.3. The draft CAAMP recommended a series of amendments to the Ashwell Conservation Area boundary and a number of representations were received in response to the proposals from Historic England, the Parish Council, the County Council and a number of local residents. The issues raised included both suggested additions and reductions to the conservation area. A full schedule of the representations and the consultant's response to those representations is attached as Appendix A.

8.4. Taking the detailed responses to the consultation into account and using their professional judgement, the consultants have recommended that the Ashwell Conservation Area boundary should be amended in some circumstances and a revised conservation area has been finalised. The CAAMP has also been revised to reflect the proposed boundary. A map of the proposed boundary changes is shown within the CAAMP attached as Appendix B.

8.5. The CAAMP sets out the background information about the legislative and policy context for designating conservation areas, includes a description of the history of Ashwell, explains the revisions to the Conservation Area boundaries and describes the assessment of significance for the Conservation Area. There is also a section in the CAAMP which sets out the potential opportunities for enhancement and proposals for the management of the Conservation Area.

8.6. If Cabinet agree that the Ashwell Conservation Area boundary should be amended, we must notify the Secretary of State and Historic England and are required to publicise the designation of the Ashwell Conservation Area with a notice placed in the London Gazette and a local newspaper, in accordance with section 70(8) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Local Land Charges register will also be updated with the details of the new boundary.

8.7. The Local Plan Policies Map, adopted in November 2022 details how and where the policies in the Local Plan have effect geographically. The maps also show a number of environmental designations, including conservation area boundaries which are designated under different pieces of legislation. The Local Plan Policies Maps will be updated with the details of the new conservation area boundaries which will be available on the website and through the interactive maps.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters, (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).

9.2. Section 69 of Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to designate areas which they consider possess architectural or historic interest worthy of preservation or enhancement as Conservation Areas. As part of this, section 71 of the Act requires the local planning authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these areas, such as in the form of an appraisal document. It is also the Local Authority's duty to ensure that special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area when making planning decisions, as per section 72 of the Act. Any decision is taken by the Local Planning Authority, and should be taken having considered the external professional consultant's report Appended at B and consultation responses at Appendix A. The consultants have confirmed that they have reached their professional conclusions in accordance with best practice guidance and the consultation responses detailed in Appendix A.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The costs for the work on the Ashwell CAAMP and boundary review has been met from within the planning fees reserve. £120k has been earmarked for conservation work over an anticipated three years. So far £19k has been spent in 2021/22 and £10.4k in 2022/23, so there is £90,553 left to fund conservation work. Each CAAMP cost around £10-12k.

10.2. If Cabinet approve the amended boundary for the Ashwell conservation area, there will be some revenue costs associated with advertising the proposed changes in the London Gazette and a local newspaper.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Sustainable Development of the District is identified as a Corporate Risk. The preparation of the CAAMP for the Ashwell Conservation Area will assist in promoting sustainable development in the future.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality implication issues arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. The adoption of the CAAMP for the Ashwell Conservation Area will assist in the management of the historic environment.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Report on the Public Consultation Process for the Ashwell Conservation Area

16.2 Appendix B – Ashwell Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, February 2023

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management, Historic England Advice Note 1, 2019

18.2 Cabinet report : Conservation Area Summary Report and Next Steps, 26 January 2021, Agenda Item 10

18.3 Cabinet report : Conservation Area Reviews, 21 June 2021

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23/02/23

Report on the Public Consultation Process for the Ashwell Conservation Area.

Introduction

After the completion of the first draft of the Ashwell Conservation Area a public event was held at Ashwell Village Hall on Wednesday 20th July, 2022, between the hours of 3pm and 7:30 pm. Prior to the event, Place Services produced illustrated posters and large scale maps, which were displayed at the Village Hall. These showed the proposed boundary alterations and described the area's special historic and architectural interest.

Bound copies of the draft document were also available for the attendees to read or take away with them for closer review. The event was well attended and there was much interest from the local community in the Conservation Area and the appraisal process.

A questionnaire had been prepared which was available to fill out by attendees during the event, or they could take them home for completion and submission later. Alternatively, attendees were encouraged to email the local authority with their comments.

Public Questionnaire Results

In total, 12 copies of the questionnaire were completed and submitted. The questionnaire included the following questions and a summary of the responses is also included.

1. How do you relate to the Conservation Area? E.g., long term resident, landowner, business owner, work or live within or near the area.

Long term resident	7
Live in Conservation Area	2
Live outside Conservation Area	2
Unspecified	1

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2. Were you previously aware that there is already a Conservation Area covering Ashwell?

Yes	12
No	0
Don't Know	0

3. Overall, how do you feel about the Conservation Area designation?

Positive	10
Neutral	1
Negative	1 due to meadow area not included
Don't Know	0

4. Do you feel that you understand what a Conservation Area is and what it does? (1 = No not at all, and 5 = yes very well)

1	0
2	0
3	0
4	4
5	8

5. Is there a building or place that you are specifically interested in and why?
Summary of responses

1	No
2	Partridge Hill
3	Village Hall
4	41 West End
5	West End of the Village - Partridge Hill
6	The Church
7	Station Road and fields beyond
8	Station Road Area
9	No
10	No
11	No
12	Museum

6. What makes Ashwell's buildings and spaces special to you?
Summary of responses

1	Long family history
2	History and surroundings
3	Timeless atmosphere
4	Variety, tradition, architectural interest and beautiful landscape setting
5	Historic value; ecological value; social value
6	All the houses pre-2000
7	We enjoy the special character of Ashwell
8	Community
9	Character of the village
10	Continuity of community
11	Maintenance and preservation of historic buildings

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12	Village atmosphere

7. Have you noticed any changes in the area, particularly since the year 2019 (the year that the last Character Statement was completed)?
Summary of responses

1	Too many large houses being built
2	New large house built at the bottom of Partridge Hill
3	Development encroaching on landscape to the south
4	Too many changes – outsiders saying when we can have our bells on
5	Excessive building
6	New buildings not in character
7	Inappropriate development permitted off Station Road – devalues Conservation Area
8	Development of Station Road
9	Inappropriate development
10	Too many new houses
11	Infilling
12	Outbuildings to a house on Partridge Hill

8. What potential threats (if any) do you think the Conservation Area faces? Typical threats to Conservation Areas include poor maintenance of buildings and spaces, inappropriate new development, unsympathetic alterations to historic buildings, impact of modern shopfronts and advertisement, vacant buildings, and vehicular traffic.

1	N/A
2	Inappropriate new development in and adjacent to Conservation Area
3	Inappropriate new development – loss of green space
4	Inappropriate new development
5	Inappropriate new development
6	Inappropriate new development
7	New housing in Conservation Areas
8	Inappropriate new development and unsympathetic alterations
9	Inadequate planning building control
10	All threats as above - More careful monitoring needed
11	Overloading infrastructures (hospitals, schools, roads, etc)
12	Inappropriate new development

9. Do you feel the four different character areas within the Conservation Area have been correctly identified?
Yes/No/Don't Know
If you have answered no, which character areas should be changed and why?

Yes	9	
No	2	Both queries regarding Station Road
Don't Know	1	

10. It is proposed to amend the Conservation Area to include elements that are considered to have special architectural or historic interest and remove those that do not. Do you agree with the revisions?

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Yes/No/Don't Know
If you have answered no, why do you think these areas either should, or should not be included within the Conservation Area?

Yes	9	
No	3	• "Just leave our village alone" • All of Donkey Meadow should be included • Include all of Station Road
Don't Know	0	

11. Do you feel there are any other areas which should be removed from the Conservation Area?
Please state below, using specific street names:

Yes	1	Station Road and Bygrave Road
No	11	

12. Do you feel there are any areas which should be included within the Conservation Area?

1	Partridge Hill
2	Partridge Hill
3	West of village adjacent to Partridge Hill (ancient trackway)
4	Donkey Meadow
5	N/A
6	No
7	No
8	No
9	Public Bridleway – Partridge Hill
10	No
11	Partridge Hill
12	All the surrounding fields

13. Do you think all the opportunities for enhancement have been identified?
Yes/No/Don't Know
If no, please provide details of aspects of the Conservation Area you think would benefit from improvement:

1	Partridge Hill and the area round the surgery
2	N/A
3	West of village adjacent to Partridge Hill (ancient trackway)
4	N/A
5	N/A
6	N/A
7	Unoccupied housing. Protection of trees and hedges
8	N/A
9	Ashwell Street and Claybush Road
10	Ashwell Street

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11	N/A
12	Protection from hedges

14. The Management Plan provides guidance on how to improve and/or preserve the significance of the Conservation Area. Do you agree with the proposals?
Yes/No/Don't Know
If you have answered no, or have further comments, please provide them here:
Comments:

1	Don't Know
2	Yes
3	N/A
4	N/A
5	N/A
6	Yes
7	Yes
8	Yes
9	N/A
10	Yes
11	Yes
12	Yes

15. Please provide any further comments you may have:

Only 1 further comment received

The proposals are fully endorsed

Assessment of Questionnaire results

The questionnaire respondents generally had strong connections to the village and cited its character, atmosphere, setting, buildings and community as being important. In response to the question regarding their understanding of what a Conservation Area is and what it does, they considered that they generally understood. However, the perception that the strengthening of the Conservation Area could be achieved by its extension into surrounding fields or areas without special interest was expressed by some respondents. The creation of a 'buffer to prevent development' was expressed during discussions at the event by some attendees. In addition, the ecological value of some areas was cited as requiring Conservation Area protection.

This suggests a common misunderstanding of the concept of a Conservation Area. It was stated during the event by Place Services that, as described in the NPPF (Paragraph 191), the designation of an area requires justification because of its '*architectural and historic special interest* 'and that the concept of conservation can be devalued through the designation of areas that lack these attributes. In addition, the concept of setting and how it can contribute to the significance of a heritage asset has become more recognised in recent years. This concept is frequently poorly understood, particularly with regard to Conservation Areas.

The respondent's suggestions of areas to be included in the Conservation Area generally focussed on three areas, Partridge Hill, Station Road and Donkey Meadow (Dixies Meadow). These had been assessed during the project but were re-examined as a result of the public consultation (along with other areas also identified through

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different means, during the public consultation). While Partridge Hill has some interest and is protected as a public bridleway, the area was found to be lacking the necessary architectural and historic interest for inclusion in the Conservation Area. Bridleways and ancient trackways are abundant in the English landscape, which itself has had thousands of years of management, exploitation and use, but this alone is not sufficient for conservation area designation. Partridge Hill is however a positive attribute within the setting of the Conservation Area. Under the NPPF, new development within the setting of heritage assets, should enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset or which better reveal its significance should be treated favourably.

Station Road was also re-examined. Station Road is within Character Area 3 of the Conservation Area, which represents the inter-War expansion of the village and the large, municipal open space of the Recreation Ground, War Memorial and the 'Homes fit for Heroes', built after the First World War. The special architectural and historic interest of the dwellings on Station Road that are currently within the Conservation Area is derived from their good survival as a group of inter-War houses. These examples on the east side of Station Road are well preserved and in close proximity to the important focal point of the War memorial and Recreation Ground. Other inter-War houses are present further to the south on Station Road, yet these are set to remain outside of the Conservation Area. This is due to two factors. The first is that there are too many examples of infill development along Station Road, with late-twentieth century dwellings that can not be considered to have special architectural and historic interest and could not be included in the boundary. Any extension here would result in a sinuous addition, following the line of Station Road, omitting numerous buildings on either side. Secondly, the preservation of the southern group of inter-War houses was considered not as good as those already within the Conservation Area. Therefore, no extension has been recommended.

Donkey Fields, also known as Dixies Meadow, is an important open space within the setting of the Conservation Area. There are no buildings currently on the meadow and historic mapping shows that the area has never been developed. Its open nature allows views from one part of the Conservation Area to another and its undeveloped character enhances the ability to appreciate Ashwell's architectural and historic special interest. The green space is also an important element of the setting of the nationally important Grade I Listed Church. As a positive element within the setting of the heritage assets the preservation of the undeveloped character of Dixies Meadow should be well assured, under the policies of the NPPF. However, its lack of buildings, both in the present and in the past, means that it cannot be considered to have architectural special interest. Its use as a donkey meadow in the past is of some local interest, yet this alone is insufficient to provide historic interest. Every field in the Conservation Area's setting has had some form of use in the near and distant past that provides a historic link to the village, yet this does not provide sufficient architectural or historic interest.

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Further consultation results

In addition to the feedback from the questionnaire, detailed comments were received from members of the public, representatives of the Parish Council, the Local Authority, Historic England and other stakeholders. These are summarised in the table below, along with responses from Place Services to the comments and the actions taken.

Name/Organisation	General Comments	Specific Comments (abridged)	Place Services Response	Action
David Cook (member of the public)	Understands and empathises with the tone of the consultation document.	1) Dixies Close (west) Considers the net has been thrown a little too wide. The properties to the west of the footpath should not be added into the conservation area. They do not meet the criteria	1) Agreed	1) Boundary revised to exclude Council House dwellings to the west of the footpath
		2) Western entrance to the conservation area, nos. 30, 32 & 34 West End should be removed from the conservation area. Traffic signage is also a negative element	2) Disagree. Number 30 is a new build but of appropriate scale and materials. Numbers 32 and 34 are neutral and could be enhanced by retention in the Conservation Area. Traffic signs may not be a positive element but they do not have sufficient detrimental impact to warrant the removal of this area.	2) Slight amendment to boundary to exclude corner of open field, but buildings retained.
		3) Area 3 – field to the south of Ashwell Street. Not architecturally or historically special. It has protected historic features, but is outside of the village boundary and in open countryside.	3) Agreed, the area lacks architectural special interest and the archaeological sites are protected as Scheduled Monuments. Its inclusion is problematic, though as setting it is highly important.	3) Proposed boundary revised to exclude the north edge of open field.
		4) Doctors Surgery & Woverly House – sees no special historic or architectural merit to either of these buildings and	4) Partially agree in the case of Woverly House. But there was an attempt in the design and use of materials in the surgery to	4) Boundary revised. Doctors' Surgery retained, Wolverly House excluded.

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		suggests their removal.	replicate a barn-like building at the village edge albeit arguably not entirely successful one. It may be improved in time by inclusion in CA	
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Xavier Preston Senior Planning Officer. Growth and Infrastructure Unit. Sustainable Growth Hertfordshire County Council		1) We would always advise that authorities engage with the HCC Historic Environment team during the preparation of consultation documents of this nature	N/A	No action required
		2) Not clear if the Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted. If not, then this should be done as a requirement of the NPPF.	2) The HER was consulted as stated see P28, 29	2) Use of HER has been made clearer in the caption of Fig 13 and in the text that the HER has been consulted
		3) At least one of the Scheduled Monuments shown in the document for Pirton are incorrect and therefore Historic England should be contacted to confirm the correct extent of Scheduled Monuments.	Relates to Pirton CA Appraisal - N/A	No action required
		4) Both the documents should be prepared using a comprehensive walk over survey of the settlements to inform their respective recommendations.	4) Multiple site visits were undertaken to inform the character analysis and assess architectural and historic special interest. A comprehensive archaeological walk-over survey would be beyond the remit of the appraisal of the CA.	No action required
		Archaeological and heritage terminology requires clarification	5) Agreed – terminology can be made clearer.	5) Additions made to text on P64

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Name/Organisation	General Comments	Specific Comments (abridged)	Place Services Response	Action
Dominic Rogers Natural England	Natural England has no comments to make on the Draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans for Ashwell and Pirton		N/A	N/A
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Mark Simmons BA Senior Conservation Officer NHDC		1) Requests different cover image	Agreed	New cover image used.
		2) Amendment to text suggested on p17/18	Agreed	Text amended
		3) Amendment to text suggested on p19	Agreed	Text amended
		4) Additional text suggested on p20	Agreed	Additions to text made
		5)Questions inclusion of council houses of Dixies Close	Agreed	Amended boundary to exclude council houses
		6) Concerns regarding inclusion of the strip of field to the south of Ashwell Street and Bronze Age barrow.	Agreed	Boundary amended to exclude strip of open field.
		7)Inclusion of Double Moated Site at Westbury Farm supported. Suggested amendment to boundary at Colbron Close. Consideration of inclusion of Dixies Meadow, although the justification foir its remaining outside CA boundary, as part of setting is accepted.	Agreed	Boundary amended. Dwellings without special interest on Colbron Close excluded. No changes made to boundary to include Dixies meadow
		8) West End – suggested boundary change to exclude area of field	Agreed	Boundary amended
		9) Question regarding critical description of Townsend Meadow. Agreement as to its lack of appropriate character within the CA	9) Any criticism of recent planning decision was not intended. Yet the unfitting character of the development cannot be ignored	9) Text amended, but exclusion of Townsend Meadow remains.

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		10)Suggested amendment to text on p29	Agreed	Text amended
		11) Suggested minor amendments to text on P 31	Agreed	Text amended
		12) Suggested addition - sites under the subheading 'Landscaping and Open Spaces'	Agreed	Text amended
		13) Minor additions recommended to text on Page 51	Agreed	Text amended
		14) Two further views recommended for inclusion Done	Agreed	Two further views added
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Parishioner and local historian David Short	Multiple comments mainly focussed on additional historical facts, corrections and information, with some. Also corrects some typo errors		Many proposed alterations from Mr Short are relevant and useful and most suggested additions have been added to the text. However, the Appraisal Document is intended to provide a brief historical overview, rather than an in-depth volume on the history of Ashwell. Therefore, some more specific or lengthy historical notes were not included	Additions made to text to clarify or flesh-out historic background. Typo errors corrected
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Ashwell Parish Council	We accept the overall proposals made by the author in terms of both the additions and deletions to the Conservation Area. However, we believe there are a number of additional areas that merit inclusion as justified below:	1) Station Road South of Ashwell Street - suggest further consideration given to including more 'Homes for Heroes' inter-War housing.	1) Too many examples of infill development of late-twentieth century dwellings without special architectural and historic interest. Further extension here would result in a sinuous addition, following the line of Station Road, omitting numerous buildings on either side. Also - the preservation of the southern group of	1)No extension to boundary proposed

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			inter-War houses is considered to be not as complete as those already within the Conservation Area. Therefore, no extension has been recommended.	
		2) Ashwell Street (to the West of Bear Lane) and Partridge Hill Considered to represent historically parts of the boundaries to the South and West of the Village and merit further consideration for inclusion in the Conservation Area.	2) Disagree - While the recognised historic boundaries of the village may be partly defined by Ashwell Street and Partridge Hill, the late twentieth century buildings within this area lack the necessary cohesive character or architectural and historic special interest.	2) CA boundary not extended to include Ashwell Street West and Partridge Hill
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Magnus Willatts Co-owner of property potentially affected by proposed extension of Conservation Area	Voiced an objection, to those areas proposed for inclusion by Ashwell Parish Council during an early-stage engagement (November 21). Concern on grounds of potential inappropriate use of policy as development control tool.	1) Large areas suggested (by Ashwell PC) without sufficient justification to individual properties or features; inclusions variously do not fulfil the requirements for Conservation Status.	1) Generally, agree. The large open areas proposed for inclusion by the Parish Council were considered to be lacking in sufficient historic or architectural special interest and have not been included. The only areas proposed by the Parish Council for inclusion that have been recommended by Place Services are Ashwell Cemetery and less than half of the area that the PC proposed, covering post-War houses in Dixies Close. The revised boundary is based solely on guidance from Historic England and the need for an area to demonstrate sufficient special	None

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			architectural and historic interest.	
		2)No consideration to relaxation of current Conservations area - areas of little heritage or historic area within current area not considered for exclusion.	Agree - the Parish Council 2021 document made no recommendations to exclude areas with no special interest. However, reductions to exclude Townsend Meadow have been made based on Place Services assessment	None
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Stephen Fleming Chair of Ashwell Show	Concerns over possible inclusion of Elbrook meadow		Elbrook Meadow not recommended for inclusion	None
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Jane Porter, 12 September 2022	Suggestion for the inclusion of Partridge Hill and western section of Ashwell Street	Cited evidence of current unmade state of pathways reflects their historic character and this contributes significantly to that of Ashwell. Cites possible origins as a Roman road, parish boundary and ancient approach to Arbury Banks	Disagree that the boundary should be extended in this area, although agree that these routes have historic origins, as do the majority of bridleways and public footpaths. They are positive elements in the setting of the CA. Yet the area lacks architectural special interest, due to the twentieth-century development. The historic origins of the trackways is not sufficient, on its own for Conservation Area designation. As public rights of way (ASHWELL 015 and ASHWELL 031), both Partridge Hill and western section of Ashwell Street are already protected by law.	None

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			A Protected Lane designation would be far more applicable in this instance, than an extension of the Conservation Area.	
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Mrs Beth Byrne [redacted]		Considers that their property is not architecturally and historically special and the adjacent dwellings should not be in the conservation area which should end at the village side of The Hedgerows (no. 30) over to the listed thatched cottage opposite.	The dwellings included at West End (34, 32 and 30) make a neutral Contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. Number 30 (hedgerows) is marginally more positive in its contribution, being built and finished with appropriate materials. The buildings are set back from the highway which is beneficial and they are not of an incongruous scale. The hedge boundary of number 32 is also a positive element to the Conservation Area. Their retention within the boundary will potentially enable enhancements to their appearance in the future.	None
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Faye Morley Senior Planning Officer | Property | Resources Hertfordshire County Council	HCC as landowner in Ashwell have no comments to make on the draft Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plans (CAAMPs) for Ashwell.			N/A
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Neville Doe Assistant Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas	The appraisal is thorough and well-detailed. It includes a well-researched historical	We recommend the inclusion of a glossary containing relevant historic environment		Glossary included Corrections to text made.

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	analysis of Ashwell which provides a useful context to understanding the conservation area designation and its significance as heritage asset. It is generally well illustrated with good photographs that show views, building exemplars and architectural features and details. The cross-referencing with other relevant local plan policies and documents is also very useful.	terminology contained in the NPPF Minor typographical errors suggested for correction		
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Drs Paul Pover & Susan Scott. [redacted]	disappointed that the conservation area was not extended to include Partridge Hill.	Cites mid-twentieth century age for dwellings, as well as presence of orchards, hedgerows and a wildlife corridor and gardens. The area has amenity value for residents and visitors who enjoy walking, horse-riding and cycling.	While the area has a tranquil character which is a positive element in the CA's setting, this is not sufficient for inclusion within the Conservation Area, which requires architectural and historic special interest. A wildlife or community designation or protected lane status would be more appropriate in this instance.	None
Name/Organisation	**General Comments**	**Specific Comments (abridged)**	**Place Services Response**	**Action**
Magnus Willatts [redacted]		Requests correction to the boundary to include historic Listed building but exclude the adjacent industrial building and the concrete driveway servicing the works. The Historic England Listing for the property describes the proposed additional part of the building as follows: "Large C20 extension on	Agreed	Boundary amended to exclude buildings of no interest, but retain Listed building

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		left is not of special interest.”		

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Ashwell Conservation Area
Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Client:
North Herts Council

Date:
February 2023



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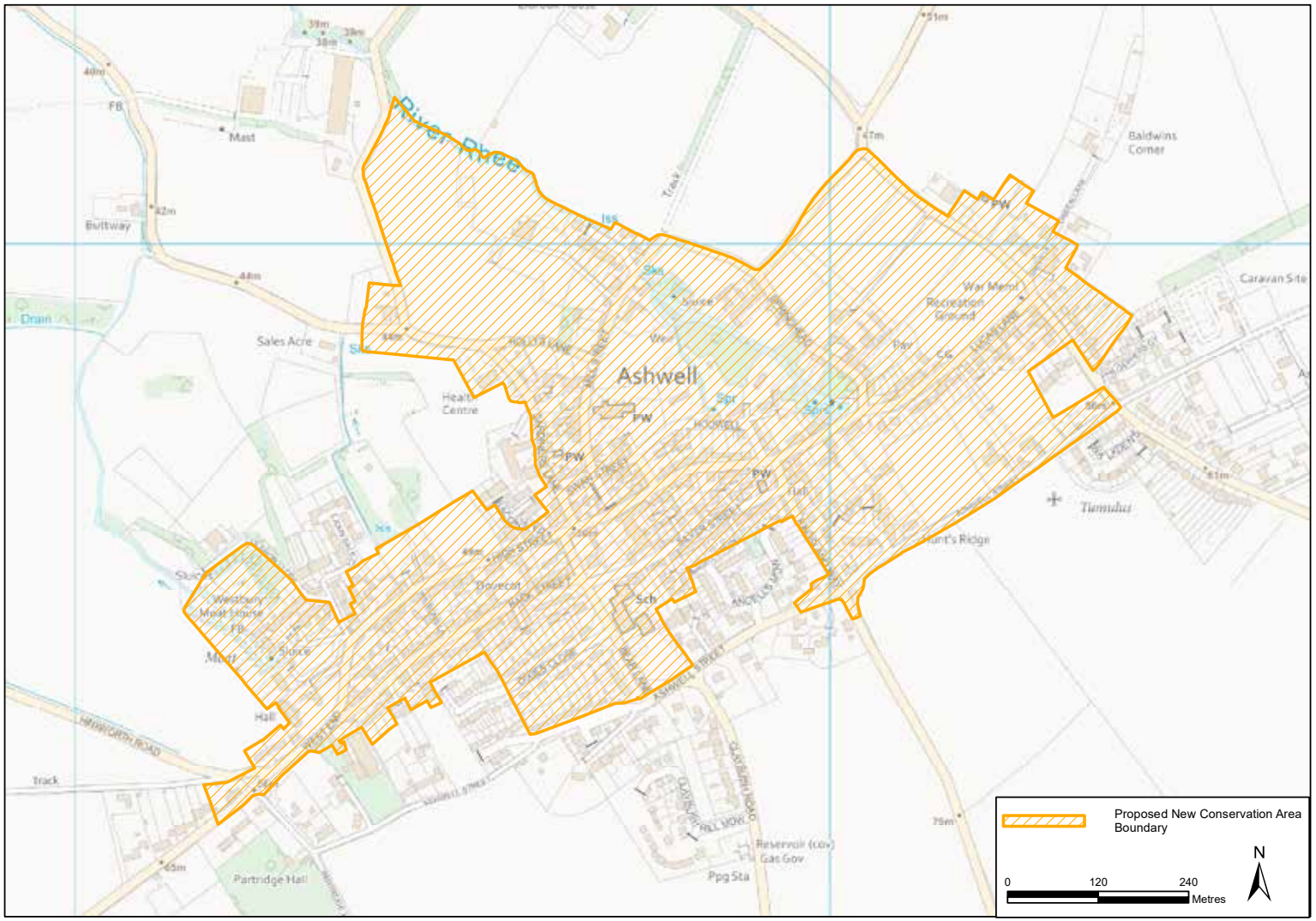

Figure 1: Map of the Ashwell Conservation Area, Proposed 2023 Boundary

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1. Introduction

1.1 Summary

The village of Ashwell is located on the site of a spring, which feeds the River Rhee, one of the main sources of the River Cam. The village is at the base of a chalk escarpment with large, flat open fields to the north. To the south there is another rising scarp of chalk, also dominated by fields in agricultural use. The village has expanded in recent decades with modern housing extending beyond the boundaries of the Conservation Area to the west, south and east.

The springs at Ashwell have been an important asset and a focus for the local population throughout history, from the prehistoric to the modern era. There is evidence for prehistoric burials and occupation in the surrounding area, while the spring water was used in brewing into the second half of the twentieth century.

The Conservation Area boundary encompasses much of the village, reflecting the valuable archaeological, architectural, social and historic features and spaces which contribute to its character and special interest. The Conservation Area includes seventy-three designated heritage assets including a scheduled ancient monument, a Registered Park and Garden, Ashwell Bury, and a Grade I listed building, St Mary's Church. There are areas of medieval settlement, nineteenth-century industrial development, inter-war civic areas and post-war housing. These elements contribute positively to the Conservation Area's significance and providing a tangible link to the history and heritage of Ashwell and its environs.

1.2 Purpose of the Appraisal

This document is to be used as a baseline to inform future change, development and design with regard to the sensitivities of the historic environment and its unique character.

The appraisal recognises designated and non-designated heritage assets within the area which contribute to its special interest, along with their setting. It will consider how different Character Areas within Ashwell Conservation Area came to be developed, their building styles, forms, materials, scale, density, roads, footpaths, alleys, streetscapes, open spaces, views, landscape, landmarks, and topography. These qualities will be used to assess the key characteristics of each area, highlighting potential impact future developments may have upon the significance of heritage assets and the character of Ashwell. This assessment is based on information derived from documentary research and analysis of the individual Character Areas.

This appraisal will enhance understanding of Ashwell Conservation Area and its development, informing future design. Applications that demonstrate an understanding of the character of a Conservation Area are more likely to produce appropriate design and positive outcomes for agents and their clients.

It is expected that applications for planning permission will also consult and follow the best practice guidance outlined in the bibliography.

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1.3 Frequently Asked Questions

A selection of frequently asked questions are outlined below. If you require further advice, please contact North Herts Council's planning department. Hyperlinks to further information are included within the text; a list of all inks is included as Appendix .

What is a conservation area?

Conservation areas are designated by the Local Planning Authority as areas of special architectural and historic interest. There are many different types of conservation area, which vary in size and character, and range from historic town centres to country houses set in historic parks. Conservation area designation introduces additional planning controls and considerations, which exist to protect an area's special character and appearance and the features that make it unique and distinctive. Although designation introduces controls over the way that owners can develop their properties, it is generally considered that these controls are beneficial as they sustain and/or enhance the value of properties within conservation areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework regards conservations areas as 'designated heritage assets'.

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act specifies the general duty of Local Authorities, in the exercise of planning functions (Section 72). The 1990 Act states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

How are conservation areas designated and managed?

The designation process includes detailed analysis of the proposed conservation area and adoption by the local planning authority. A review process should be periodically undertaken, and the Conservation Area assessed to safeguard that it retains special architectural or historic interest. Threats can be identified, and the boundary reviewed, to ensure it is still relevant and appropriate.

This Conservation Area is supported by an appraisal and management plan. The appraisal describes the importance of an area in terms of its character, architecture, history, development form and landscaping. The management plan, included within the appraisal, sets out various positive proposals to improve, enhance and protect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

How can I find out if I live in a conservation area?

Boundary maps of all conservation areas in the district can be found on North Herts Council's website. The council also has an online interactive map search function, which allows you to search for a specific property. Full details, including contact details for the local authority, can be accessed via https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/conservation-areas.

What are the Council's duties regarding development in conservation areas?

The Local Authority must follow the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). These set out in clear terms how development proposals within Conservation Areas should be considered on the basis of whether they preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area. Applications which fail to preserve or enhance the character of the

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Conservation Area are likely to be refused as a result. An authorities Local Plan also typically includes a specific policy on Conservation Areas.

Do I need permission to change a property in a conservation area?

Permitted development rights are not the same within a conservation area as they are elsewhere. This means things that normally would not require planning permission will require consent within a conservation area's boundary. For example, side extensions, two storey rear extensions, roof extensions and the cladding of buildings, which normally would class as permitted development, require planning permission if the building affected is in a conservation area.

North Herts Council's planning team can provide further information on whether alterations require planning permission. Full details of permitted development rights are set out in The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2020.

Further consideration may also need to be given to the setting of listed buildings, which many conservation areas are likely to contain.

Do I need to make an application for routine maintenance work?

If routine maintenance works are to be carried out using authentic materials and traditional craft techniques, on a like-for-like basis, it is unlikely that you will need to apply for permission from the local authority. However, it is strongly recommended that you contact the local planning authority for clarification before commencing any works. The use of a contractor with the necessary skills and experience of working on historic buildings is essential. Inappropriate maintenance works and the use of the wrong materials will cause damage to the fabric of a historic building.

What is an Article 4 Direction?

Some conservation areas are covered by an Article 4 Direction, which brings certain types of development back under the control of a local planning authority. This is in addition to the exemptions outlined in the Permitted Development Order Act and, where in place, an Article 4 direction allows potentially harmful proposals to be considered on a case by case basis through planning applications. Article 4 Directions are used to control works that could threaten the character of an area and a planning application may be required for development that would otherwise have been permitted development. Historic England provides information on Article 4 Directions on their website. See https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/historic-environment/article4direction.

Can I demolish a building in a conservation area?

Demolition, or substantial removal of part of a building within a conservation area, will usually require permission from the local planning authority. It is important to speak to them before beginning any demolition works, to clarify if permission is required. This includes the demolition of boundary walls.

Will I need to apply for permission for a new or replacement garage, fence, boundary wall or garden structure?

Any demolition, development or construction in conservation areas will generally need planning permission. A replacement boundary, garage, cartlodge or greenhouse will need to be designed with the special historic and architectural interest of the Conservation Area in mind. North Herts Council will provide advice as to how to proceed with an application.

Can I remove a tree within a conservation area?

If you are thinking of cutting down a tree or doing any pruning work,

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the local planning authority must be notified 6 weeks before any work begins. This enables the authority to assess the contribution the tree makes to the character of the conservation area and, if necessary, create a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) to protect it. Consent will be required for any works to trees that are protected. Further information on TPOs can be found on Historic England's website (https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/tree/).

How can I find out more?

Historic England's website has information on conservation areas and their designation. Further information on the importance of conservation areas, and what it means to live in one, can also be accessed via their website:(https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/has/conservation-areas/).

Historic England has also published an advice note called Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management which sets out advice on the appraisal of conservation areas and managing change in conservation areas. It is available to download here: https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1/.

In addition, local planning authorities have information on the conservation areas within their boundaries available on their websites. They will have information pertaining to when the conservation area was designated, how far it extends and the reason for its designation.

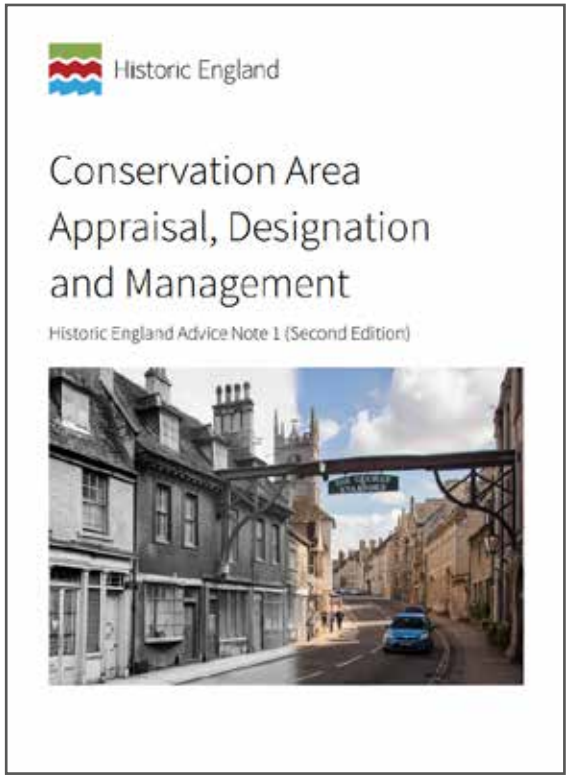

Figure 2: Cover Page, *Conservaton Area Appraisal, Designation and Management*, Historic England

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1.4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policies

The national legislative framework for the creation, conservation and enhancement of conservation areas and listed buildings is set out Part II of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (HMSO 1990).

Section 69 of this act requires Local Planning Authorities to designate areas which they consider possess architectural or historic interest worthy of preservation or enhancement as Conservation Areas. As part of this, section 71 of the Act requires the Local Planning Authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these areas, such as in the form of an appraisal document. It is also the Local Authority's duty to ensure that special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the conservation when making planning decisions, as per section 72 of the Act.

National planning policy in relation to the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets is outlined in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF (DCLG 2021). Chapter 16 of the NPPF relates specifically to the historic environment, with Annex 2: Glossary providing a definition of heritage terms, some of which are reproduced in Appendix 6.4 of this document.

Within the NPPF, the importance of heritage assets is outlined, with emphasis placed upon the contribution they make to the quality of life of existing and future generations. Local Planning Authorities should seek to preserve or enhance the historic environment, developing strategies which consider the wider benefits that the conservation of heritage assets can bring, and draw upon the contribution made by the historic environment to local character and distinctiveness.

A further national planning policy which applies is The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2020.

Careful consideration must be given to the Permitted Development Order by the Local Planning Authority, Residents and other Interested Parties, as many permitted development rights are removed in Conservation Areas.

Local planning polices

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031

The local plan was adopted on 8th November 2022. A summary of the relevant polices is given below:

SP13: Historic Environment. This sets out the Council's heritage strategy and its positive intentions to conserve and enhance its heritage assets and their setting whilst enabling appropriate development in accordance with paragraph 126 of the NPPF. The policy is based on a wide range of evidence that make up the District's heritage.

Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets. This policy recognises the significance of North Hertfordshire's designated heritage assets and their settings.

Policy HE2: Heritage at risk. This policy is concerned with the Council's efforts to manage 'at risk' heritage. This covers the national Historic England heritage at risk register, which includes scheduled monuments and heritage assets designated at grade I or II* and conservation areas. The Council also produces an 'At Risk' register that covers all listed building grades.

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Policy HE3: Non-designated heritage assets. This reflects the Council's approach to local heritage assets. Assets are identified as part of a rolling programme of research to inform local lists of heritage assets and through the planning and plan making process

Policy HE4: Archaeology. This relates to archaeological remains and reflects the methods to investigate, and the potential for chance discoveries. Areas of as yet, unknown archaeology may be identified during research, or through the planning or plan making process. These sites or areas should be treated in the same as archaeology areas and areas of archaeological significance.

Supplementary Planning Guidance:

Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan 2021

Relevant policies:

Policy ASH3 Character of Development

Policy ASH4 Design of Development

Policy ASH8 Protecting Historic Assets

Policy ASH9 Locally Significant Views

Policy ASH10 Natural Landscape and Rural Character

Policy ASH11 Natural Wildlife Assets, Wildlife Corridors and Green Infrastructure

The Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan was submitted by the Parish Council to North Hertfordshire District Council on 5 February 2021 and is now part of the statutory development plan. The plan sets out a vision for the parish and planning policies which will be used to determine planning applications within the parish. The Ashwell community has stressed that new development should reflect the character of the parish and that the design of development should look and feel like local properties and the Neighbourhood Plan requires high-quality design standards that integrate with the area and reflect and reinforce, without overwhelming, the rural character of the parish.

Policy ASH3 of the Neighbourhood Plan relates to character of development and states the following:

A) *Development should conserve and enhance the Conservation Area, the Character Areas V1 to V5 as shown in Figure 7.1 , and key views and assets identified in the Conservation Area Character Statement 2019.*

B) The design of new development should demonstrate how it has taken account of the local context and reflected the character and vernacular of the area, using architectural variety in form and materials, in order to avoid building design that is inappropriate to the ANP area. For example: clusters of large, similar houses (in excess of three bedrooms) are not a characteristic of the village. However, innovation in design will be supported where this demonstrably enhances the quality of the built form in a character area.

C) As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should address the following criteria:

> *(i) make a positive contribution to the visual impact of the village from the highway and footpath approaches; and*
>
> *(ii) not have a significantly detrimental impact on the local views as set out in POLICY ASH9 Locally significant views.*

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D) Development proposals affecting designated and non-designated heritage assets (either directly or via a change in their settings), will be expected to respect, conserve and enhance the significance of those assets.

In Policy ASH9 the Plan identifies locally significant views and states the following:

A) The Plan identifies twenty one locally-significant views, described and mapped in Figures 6.9 and 6.10. As appropriate to their scale and nature, development proposals within the arcs of the various views as shown on Figure 7.10 should be designed in a way that safeguards the locally-significant view or views concerned.

B) Development proposals are required to ensure that they do not have a significantly detrimental impact on the locally significant views shown in Figure 7.9 and mapped in Figure 7.10 and the policy maps, Figure 16.1 and Figure 16.2

C) Development proposals are to comply with the findings and guidelines in Character Area Assessment 224 referred to in paras 7.44 to 7.47 of the ANP.

In addition, the Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan identifies distinct character areas, such as West End, Station Road, Angell's Meadow and Woodforde Close. In addition, it identifies five Visual Character Areas:

- V1: The "Church and Environs" preserves the open nature of the church and surrounding farmsteads and meadows to the North of the village.
- V2: The "Eastern Area" protects the ribbon development east of the recreation area and treats it as part of the countryside.
- V3: “Dixies Meadow / West End” protects farmstead buildings and extensive views of the countryside fields.
- V4: The "Southwest Area" protects against further extension of the village in this area, which would appear to be visually sensitive and located on rising ground.
- V5: The "Southern Edge" protects the low density, ribbon development from further consolidation.

Policy ASH10 states that development proposals should maintain and enhance the natural environment, and retain landscape features, in accordance with Natural England’s Statements of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) for the East Anglian chalkland character area and enhance the rural character and setting of Ashwell (Policy ASH 10A).

Policy ASH11 states that planning applications should take account of the need to manage wildlife assets, wildlife corridors and green infrastructure, and must demonstrate a net biodiversity gain using the DEFRA/Natural England metric. The proposals must have no adverse effect on Ashwell Springs.

The Nieghbourhood Plans states that the NPPF allows for the designation of local green spaces which are of particular importance to the local community. This will afford protection to areas that fulfil certain criteria, including the following

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- Where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves

- Where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife.

- Where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Further information on neighbourhood planning policies and guidance can be accessed via this link: https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning.

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2. Context and Character

The Ashwell Conservation Area encompasses the historic core of the village, reflecting the scale of the Anglo-Saxon settlement. It includes most of the settlement of Ashwell, excluding some areas of modern housing to the south and east, The High Street runs west to east through the centre of the settlement, while plots extend to the north and south. Beyond the High Street there are secondary west to east running lanes, Back Street and Silver Street to the south and Hodwell and Swan Street to the north. To the north, the Conservation Area includes the Registered Park and Garden of Ashwell Bury.

Ashwell was a planned market town, a borough, probably about 920. By 1086 and the time of Domesday Book, it was one of the five boroughs in Hertfordshire. The early marketplace may have been located at the western end of Swan Street, although being off the main coaching routes across the county, Ashwell's markets and fairs appear to have declined in the post-medieval period. To the north of this area, along Mill Street is the medieval church of St Mary, a Grade I listed building, the scale of which indicates the wealth and prosperity of the medieval village. The historic core of the village has a number of timber-framed domestic houses, while on the periphery of the historic core are examples of timber-framed farmsteads and agricultural buildings. Some timber-framed buildings were re-clad in red brick in the post-medieval period, reflecting changes in architectural tastes. In the nineteenth century there was an expansion to the village, partly due to the brewing industry within Ashwell, exploiting the natural spring. There was also a significant fire in the village in 1850 and presumably many timber-framed buildings were lost, to be replaced with buildings often in Arlesey white bricks.

Ashwell Conservation Area has a coherent character, although within this there are distinct variations, which represent phases in the historical development of the settlement, right up to the twentieth century.



Figure 3: A satellite Image showing Ashwell and its environs

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2.1 Origin and Evolution

The following section provides an overview of the history of Ashwell Conservation Area and the surrounding settlement.

Prehistory: Palaeolithic to Iron Age (-10,000 BCE – 43 AD)

The wider Ashwell area has a history of activity originating in the pre-historic period, probably due in part to the presence of the springs which are the source of the River Rhee. There is much evidence for prehistoric activity locally and notably, 1.2km to the south-west of the centre of Ashwell is the site of the Iron Age univallate hillfort of Arbury Banks.

Within the Conservation Area itself, evidence of prehistoric activity has been found. Pits and a ditch dating from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age were found at Westbury Farm in 1997 at the western end of the Conservation Area.

Late Iron Age-Early Roman finds were recovered from the field between the High Street/Lucas Lane and Ashwell Street, known as 'Hunts Close'. A double-ditched enclosure also from the Late Iron Age/Early Roman period has been identified on the western side of Hunts Close, which may potentially represent the site of a Romano-British temple.

Directly opposite Hunts Close, on the other side of the High Street, further multi-period finds were recovered over a number of years including a substantial collection of 258 worked flints dating from the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age, late Iron Age-Early Roman pottery, and Romano-British coins.

As well as the sites described above, there are several locations in close proximity to the Conservation Area that contain important prehistoric remains, and therefore have a bearing on the archaeological potential of the area. These include a substantial late Neolithic henge monument and cropmarks of five ring-ditches to the south, a possible Late Iron Age-Early Roman Road east of the Conservation Area, several Romano-British burials to the east, and surviving earthworks of the early Iron Age hillfort of Arbury Banks to the south-west of Ashwell [Figure 4].

Roman (43 – 410 AD)

The Ashwell area has a wealth of evidence for activity in the Roman era, again due to the presence of the natural springs. Multiple sites within the Conservation Area contain Roman remains. A collection of Roman coins and second and third-century pottery sherds were uncovered in Hunts Close, as well as a decorated handle displaying the head of Neptune, and a copper-alloy bird terminal.



Figure 4: Arbury Banks Hillfort to the southwest of Ashwell (Ashwell Parish Archives)

Several other important Roman sites are located in close proximity to Ashwell's conservation area. Perhaps most prominently, around 1km to the north-west of the conservation area, at Ashwell End, a Roman ritual feasting site was uncovered in 2002, dedicated to the previously unknown goddess 'Senuna' [Figure 5]. It has been suggested that the tributary at Ashwell originally would have borne the name 'Senuna', which linguistically evolved over the intervening centuries into 'Rhee'. The site contained depositions of pottery, figurines and hoards of gold and silver objects.

An area 900m to the north-east of Ashwell is designated as a Scheduled Monument and the location of the Roman Villa, while roughly

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1.5 km to the northwest is the site of a Roman fortlet. In addition, around 1.2km to the north-west of the conservation area remains of a substantial Roman villa and surrounding complex were excavated in 1972-3 and were possibly connected to the Senuna site. Further cropmarks 1.3km south-west of Ashwell appear to show another Roman Villa surrounded by an associated field system and other enclosures.

Anglo Saxon and Early Medieval (410 – 1066 AD)

The layout of the Anglo-Saxon borough is legible in Ashwell's historic core. It is centred around the market place, delineated by High Street, Gardiners Lane, Swan Street, Hodwell and the footpath from the Lock up to The Springs and Mill Street , with the area dominated by the Church of St Mary. An excavation at Merchant Taylor's School, on the west side of Mill Street, in 2004 uncovered several medieval features, of a general eleventh-thirteenth century date. These were interpreted as being indicative of a period of growth in the medieval settlement , as it expanded in the area immediately around the church.

As with earlier periods, Hunts Close has revealed archaeological remains dating to the medieval period including an assemblage of pottery, several metal objects, coins, and a pewter pilgrim's badge.



Figure 5: Statuette of the Goddess Senuna, found at Ashwell End (Ashwell Museum)

Westbury Farm, partially within the western extent of the Conservation Area, is a historic farmstead, with a section of moat surviving on its western side. Moated sites are a significant class of medieval settlement form, most commonly dating to between 1250 and 1350 and often containing high-status ecclesiastical or private residences. At Westbury Farm twelfth and thirteenth-century buildings underlie the three later moat phases from the fourteenth century.

Ashwell originated as a Borough and thus was a market town in origin. The first documented reference to a market is in 1211, and in 1295 the Abbot of Westminster claimed rights to hold a market and fairs at Ashwell. Several listed buildings within the conservation area have late medieval origins, including the Grade II* listed Town House, now Ashwell Museum which dated to 1460. The Grade II listed Lychgate of St Mary's Church dates to c 1500, as does the Grade II listed Chantry House. The Grade I listed Ashwell St Mary Church was completed in 1381 and its scale and grandeur are evidence for the wealth of the settlement in the medieval era [Figure 6]. However, Ashwell appears to have entered a period of slow decline in the early post-medieval period . This is likely to have been due to either the decline of the market, or the somewhat isolated position of the village off the main routeways across Hertfordshire and the village became more reliant on agriculture as a source of income.

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Post-Medieval (1540 – 1901 AD)

By 1799 there was no longer an official market at Ashwell, although the last reference to a market existing is in 1862. Expansion of the village was limited before the nineteenth century, although architecturally there are examples of earlier timber-framed buildings being reclad with fashionable brick facades in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The small country house of Ashwell Bury at the centre of the Registered Park and Garden is early-nineteenth century in date, with late-nineteenth century extensions. The building was altered and extended again by Sir Edwin Lutyens between 1922-26.

At about 11pm on the 2nd of February 1850, what became known as the Great Fire of Ashwell broke out towards the western end of Back Street. It burned until 4am the next morning and destroyed many buildings, to the south of the High Street, reaching as far east as Kingsland Way. This area was subsequently redeveloped with brick-built buildings and as a result has a more prominent nineteenth-century character. A plan of Ashwell before the fire was captured in the 1840 Tithe map [Figure 7].

The Ashwell Spring provided the necessary supply of fresh water for the establishment of breweries in Ashwell and this became an important economic activity in the village. A brewery was founded in 1843 by Benjamin Christy and John Sale and later acquired by J.R. Page. The brewery was located on the north side of West End but closed in the early twentieth century the malting was retained and converted into a village hall in 1922.The remainder of the buildings were demolished in 1947.

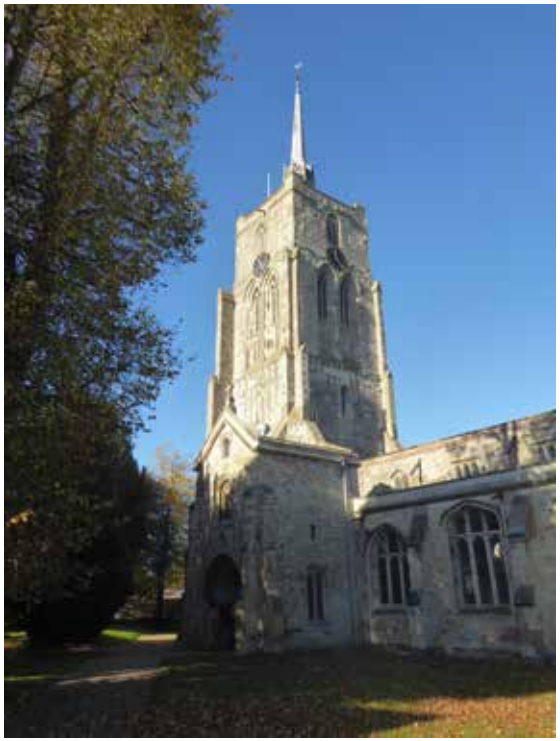

Figure 6: St Mary's Church

Modern (1901 – present)

George Fordham and his son Edward George began brewing in Mill Street in 1836. The brewery remained open until 1953, but was eventually largely demolished by 1973, with the remaining buildings converted into housing. The country house associated with this brewery is Ashwell Bury, now contained within an early 20th-century planned garden. Along with brewing and agriculture, coprolite digging (fossilised dinosaur faeces) and straw plaiting were also important industries.

When ground up, coprolites can be mixed with acid or water to make agricultural fertiliser. Straw plaiting to make hats and bonnets was an important cottage industry in the 19th century mainly part practiced by women and children to supplement the household income of agricultural labouring families.

Ashwell's population declined between 1891 and 1901, when the demand for straw plait stopped and the supply of coprolites became exhausted. In the twentieth century the two breweries closed, Pages in 1919 and Fordhams in 1966.

Ashwell Railway Station located to the south-east of the village, was opened by the Royston and Hitchin Railway Company (R&HR) in 1850, the station being one of many on the line

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between Hitchin and Shepreth. The R&HR was later absorbed by the Great Northern Railway and the station's name was later changed to Ashwell and Morden in 1920. The multi-period archaeological site of Hunts Close also contains the partial remains of a wrecked Second World War airplane. Multiple metalwork fragments have been found on the site and attributed to the plane. The report on the trial trenching investigation of the site in 2019 postulated that the debris recovered from the site is the result of a mid-air collision that occurred in July 1941, between a Wellington Bomber (R1334) and a German Junkers 88. Some accounts state that the Wellington came down in Hunts Close (narrowly avoiding the historic village), while the Junkers 88 crashed in a field on the southern side of Ashwell Street. All crew involved in the crash were killed.

At the eastern end of the Recreation Ground, on the corner of Lucas Lane and Station Road is the Grade II listed Ashwell War Memorial. It was unveiled in 1921, after Ashwell's war memorial committee had selected a winning design. The Committee was set up in 1919 under the chairmanship of Wolverley Attwood Fordham, of Fordham's Brewery, with his wife Phyllis as secretary. The cross was built in Portland stone by Holland, Hannen and Cubitt Ltd, the same contractors for the Cenotaph in Whitehall. The memorial was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the pre-eminent architect for war memorials in England, France and the British Empire, who's design was selected over other competitors, including the architect Sir Reginald Blomfield.

In the Post-war era, the area between Back Street and Ashwell Street, to the south of the village core, was developed with council housing. With bomb-damaged cities and men returning from service in the armed forces a nationwide short-term solution was needed to the housing crisis. The Ministry of Works undertook a nationwide housing programme, which saw the construction of prefabricated concrete houses, designed by Sir Edwin Airey. They subsequently became known as Airey Houses, of which Dixies Close is an example.



Figure 7: 1840 Tithe Map.The Conservation Area is marked in red



Figure 8: 1888 Ordnance Survey Map. The Conservation Area is marked in red

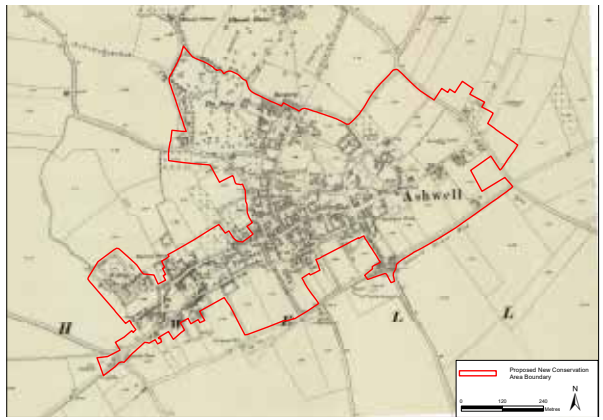

Figure 9: 1903 Ordnance Survey Map, the Conservation Area is marked in red

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2.2 Designation of the Conservation Area

Ashwell Conservation Area was designated by North Hertfordshire District Council in 1968 and its boundary was amended in 1978 and 1986. A Conservation Area Character Statement was produced in 2019, which identified the significance of the Conservation Area but did not assess the boundary or provide a management plan.

There are currently no Article 4 Directions within the Ashwell Conservation Area.

2.3 Revisions to the Boundary

As part of this review, the Conservation Area boundary has been revised to reflect changing methodologies of good practice and provide a clearer strategy which acknowledges the practicalities of Ashwell's unique built environment. This review is in line with the NPPF guidance on Conservation Areas (paragraph 191).

A map which marks the existing and proposed boundary is included as Figure 10, this revised boundary has been informed by site visits, document research and information provided by residents and the parish council. During the early engagement phase, Ashwell Parish Council proposed areas for consideration for inclusion in the Conservation Area boundary. These were also assessed for their historic and architectural special interest.

When assessing the designation of conservation areas, it is essential that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest. The inclusion of areas which lack special interest, undermines the concept of the Conservation Area and weakens the protection it affords . While an area may be valued by the local community for its ecological significance or its wildlife, or for views that it provides, without a tangible, architectural or historic special interest it cannot be considered appropriate for protection by Conservation Area designation. Other local and national designations are more suited to protecting undeveloped areas of natural wildlife or areas of beauty or ecological significance.

The relationship to the setting of the Conservation Area and its boundary is also an important one to consider. In this case, the setting of Ashwell Conservation Area has a distinct, rustic character and the village is surrounded by open fields, hedgerows and paddocks which enhance the ability to appreciate the Conservation Area's significance and character, but do not have the special architectural or historic interest in their own right. The setting of Ashwell Conservation Area is discussed in detail in section 3.2.6 of this document

Additions

As a result of the assessment a number of areas were proposed for inclusion within the boundary and these vary in size, with small adjustments to complement property boundaries as well as whole new streets of houses being included. The areas proposed for addition are given below:

1) Ashwell Street between Bear Lane and Partridge Hill

This area stretches from the corner of Newnham Way and Partridge Hill, up Partridge Hill to Ashwell Street and along the south side of Ashwell Street to Bear Lane linking up with the present Conservation Area.

In the immediate post-war period, the Ministry of Works undertook a nationwide housing programme, with the construction of pre-fabricated

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concrete houses, clad with shiplap concrete panels. Initially, 6 bungalows were built circa 1947 on part of Bear Lane meadow and these were followed by 18 pre-fabricated houses at Dixies Close (nos.6-24 (evens) and nos. 5-19 (odds)). They were designed by Sir Edwin Airey and became known as Airey Houses. They were intended to be a short-term solution to the housing shortage and due to their basic construction, they quickly reached the end of their intended life-span and many surviving examples today are in disrepair. The recladding of the homes became essential and the examples of the Airey Houses on Dixies Close were refurbished with facing brickwork in 1989. Although no longer of their original appearance, Dixies Close remains a distinctive and cohesive development that is defined by its uniformity and has some historic interest.

The inclusion of the unpaved parts of Ashwell Street along with some of its late-twentieth century houses, which are set back from the road with large gardens, has also been considered. In addition, the allotments, a late twentieth century works building and modern houses have been assessed. Views from here out of the village to open fields and the strong connection to the countryside are important attributes but these areas do not have sufficient attributes to contribute to the architectural or historic special interest of the Conservation Area.

In contrast, the Airey Houses on Dixies Close are of historic and architectural interest. The general poor quality of Airey Houses when built has resulted in many being found unsuitable for mortgage and although built across the nation in the 1940s and 50s, those that survive are seldom in as good condition as the examples in Ashwell. They were successfully re-clad in the 1980s, which ensured their continued use and survival. The buildings represent a single phase of development, illustrative of a recognised historic period of construction on a national level, to provide dwellings after the Second World War.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Conservation Area boundary is extended to include the Airey Houses on Dixies Close up to and including the public footpath that runs north-west to south-east . However, the inclusion of the later council houses, the allotment gardens and the late-twentieth century houses, to the west of the allotment gardens is not recommended.

2) Ashwell Cemetery

The village cemetery on Station Road is partially already included within the Conservation Area boundary and it contains two listed tombstones. However, the Arts and Crafts style chapel of ease and a further plot of the cemetery are currently excluded. The extension of the boundary to include the chapel and the rest of the cemetery has been considered. The well-kept cemetery and the chapel are of sufficient character and architectural special interest to warrant inclusion within the Conservation Area and therefore it is recommended that the boundary is extended to include the whole of Ashwell Cemetery.

3) West of Gardiners Lane

The Conservation Area boundary has been amended to the west of Gardiners Lane. The boundary now follows the property line of the Ashwell Surgery, a late-twentieth century building, which with its single-storey profile and weatherboard cladding, was an attempt at the time to replicate an agricultural building on the village periphery.

4) Westbury Double Moated Site

It is proposed to extend the boundary to include the whole of the double moated manor site at Westbury. Moated manorial sites were a development of the later-medieval era, mainly as a demonstration of status, but the moat also would have provided some security and

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seclusion. There are in the region of 6,000 moated sites known in England and double moated sites are less common. The site at Westbury is not a scheduled monument but contains the Grade II listed Westbury Farmhouse, a fifteenth to sixteenth-century hall house with jettied cross wings and two associated, later Grade II listed agricultural buildings. The extension of the boundary includes all of the historic earthworks that form the setting of the listed buildings. The significance of the site will enhance the overall historic special interest of the Conservation Area.

5) 34 West End

On the north side of West End the boundary has been amended slightly, so as to conform to the existing boundary of the garden of the dwelling at number 34. Similarly, the boundary has been adjusted to fit existing property boundaries to the west of the Westbury moated site. Numbers 30, 32 and 34 West End are late twentieth century dwellings retained within the boundary. Number 30 is the most recent and has been built with a brick plinth, rendered finish and a slate roof, which is fitting for the Conservation Area. Numbers 32 and 34 are late-twentieth century bungalows and while they are less appropriate, they are neutral buildings and their retention within the boundary will serve to allow for future enhancement.

6) The Orchard, West End

In the area where West End intersects with Back Street the boundary has been amended to include the whole of the listed building at The Orchard, on the southern side of West End. This amendment continues to exclude the modern works building adjacent to The Orchard.

Reductions

7)Townsend Meadow

A modern development of houses on Station Road at what is now called Townsend Meadow has been removed from the Conservation Area. The materials and design of the dwellings do not reference the Conservation Area's character and the cul-de-sac development is somewhat at odds with its historic pattern of development.

8) West of Gardiners Lane and Bacons Yard

The apartments at Wolverly House are proposed for exclusion from the Conservation Area. These are again a later twentieth century development but there is an extreme contrast in terms of their design and appearance, with the character of the Conservation Area. An open strip to the west of the Grade II Listed cobb and thatched wall has been retained within the Conservation Area to provide a suitable area of separation between the wall and Wolverly House.

At Bacons Yard, the boundary has been amended to remove late-twentieth century development that does not preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area, whilst retaining the two Listed buildings fronting the High Street.

9) Colbron Close

At Colbron Close the boundary has also been amended to exclude a late-twentieth housing development, which lacks sufficient architectural or historic interest. Number 6 High Street was also built at this time but has been retained in the Conservation Area. It makes a slight contribution to the areas character and faces on to the main thoroughfare. The dwelling has a distinctive barge board to its front gable and also has an earlier, brick-built boundary wall, which are positive elements in the Conservation Area. The retention of number 6 within the boundary will help to ensure future changes to the building are in keeping with the character and distinctiveness of the area.

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10) Land at Hinxworth Road

A triangular area of open ground on the north side of Hinxworth Road has been removed from the Conservation Area, as it is without architectural or historic special interest. The undeveloped area, along with the adjacent agricultural fields are part of the rural setting of the Conservation Area. This is an important entry point into the Conservation Area and the open, rural and undeveloped character of the triangular space and the adjacent fields, is a positive element of that setting, enhancing the ability to appreciate the Conservation Area's special interest.

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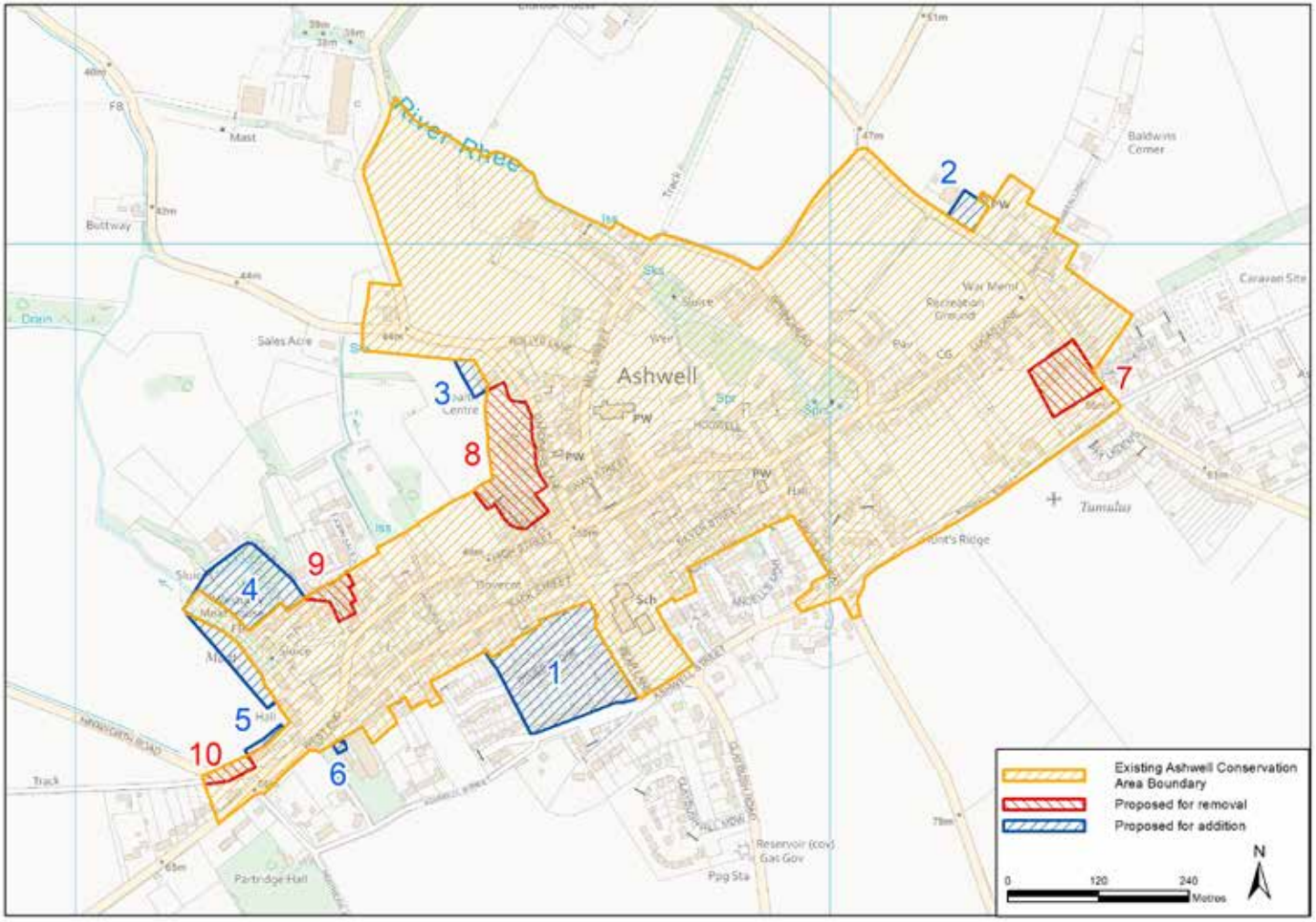

Figure 10: Map showing the proposed additions and reductions to the Ashwell Conservation Area

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2.4 Designated Heritage Assets

There are seventy-three designated heritage assets within the Ashwell Conservation Area boundary, including timber framed houses, agricultural buildings, monuments and the Grade I listed Church of St Mary. A full list of all the designated assets within the Conservation Area is included in Appendix 6.1.

These buildings, structures and features have been listed by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport due to their special historic and architectural interest as defined by Historic England. Further information about the listing process can be found on the Historic England website.

Ashwell Conservation Area contains a very high number of listed buildings which emphasises its special architectural and historic interest. Many building types are designated, including timber-framed buildings, brewery buildings, historic inns, places of worship, cottages and shops, providing a rich and layered representation of English architectural history. The variety is important, highlighting how Ashwell has developed and altered over time and acknowledging the multiple phases of its development.

As a result of the proposed revisions to the boundary, Ashwell Conservation Area contains the northernmost example of a group of five Bronze Age ring ditches, which are listed as a scheduled monument: Crop Marks of five Ring Ditches west of Station Road, Ashwell. The features form a coherent group of prehistoric funerary monuments and are a major component of the multi-period ritual landscape around the village.

The five ring ditches are to the south of Ashwell Street, dispersed across a number of fields and are centred on the site of a henge. The henge was initially identified as a round barrow through aerial photograph but was then redefined as a henge following a full excavation. The ring ditches probably represent the remains of a dispersed barrow cemetery, and the area has considerable archaeological potential. The area within and around the crop marks may contain flat graves, cremation burials and traces of early occupation.

Ashwell Conservation Area contains Ashwell Bury Registered Park and Garden which lies on the northern edge of the village. The main approach is off Mill Street, between two brick piers flanked by a brick wall, to the south-east of the Grade II listed Ashwell Bury House. The house was built in the early-19th century and extended in the late-19th century. It was remodelled from 1922 to 1923 by Sir Edwin Lutyens.

The formal gardens and pleasure grounds lie to the west and north-west of the house and include terraces, stone steps and a kitchen garden. The gardens date to the early twentieth century and were designed by Gertrude Jekyll. The house and gardens are situated within a further four hectares of parkland. Jekyll's detailed layout and planting plans survive and are dated 1908-1909. Views from the parkland extend south-east towards the church and village, and south and west over agricultural land.



Figure 11: The view towards the spire of St Marys Church from the Registered Park and Garden of Ashwell Bury

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2.5 Non-Designated Heritage Assets

All buildings, features and planned landscapes within a Conservation Area contribute to its significance. These can be measured on a sliding scale of positive, to neutral, to negative contributors.

Heritage assets are defined in Planning Policy Legislation as 'A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.'

Not all heritage assets are designated. Although a building may not be included on the national list, this does not always mean it is of no heritage value. Buildings and other smaller features of the built environment such as fountains, railings, signs and landscaping can make a positive contribution to the appreciation of an area's historic interest and its general appearance.

Local listing is an important tool for local planning authorities to identify non-listed buildings and heritage assets which make a positive contribution to the locality. North Herts Council currently has Registers of Buildings of Local Interest for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, Newnham, Knebworth (parish) and Royston.

No Register of Buildings of Local Interest currently exists for Ashwell. This document has identified some non-designated heritage assets which make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area and could be considered for local listing in the future. These are listed opposite and descibed in the descriptions of each of the four Character Areas outlined in Section Three. The assessment of the buildings of Ashwell is not exhaustive and there may be buildings of local heritage significance that are not mentioned in this document, that would still qualify for local listing.

Character Area 1, Ashwell's Historic Core

- The Ashwell United Reform Church
- Kingsland Terrace
- The Zoar Baptist Chapel, Gardiners Lane
- 86 and 88 High Street, Cambridge Villas
- 4 West End
- 83 Back Street, Bellbine Cottage
- Dixies Barns
- The Adelong, 63 High Street
- London House, 24 and 25 High Street
- 55-53 Silver Street, Bank Cottages
- Brick Wall, Corner of Mill Street and Rollys Lane

Character Area 2, The Rural Edge and Ashwell Bury Estate

- Mill Street Stable and Coach House
- 47 Mill Street
- Former Brewery Building, Fordham Close
- Ashwell Grange
- Ringstead House, 18 Springhead

Character Area 3, Interwar Development

- Former Maltings, Station Road
- The Cemetery Chapel, Station Road
- The Elms, 36 Lucas Lane
- The Cricketers, 32 Lucas Lane
- The Recreation Ground Pavilion

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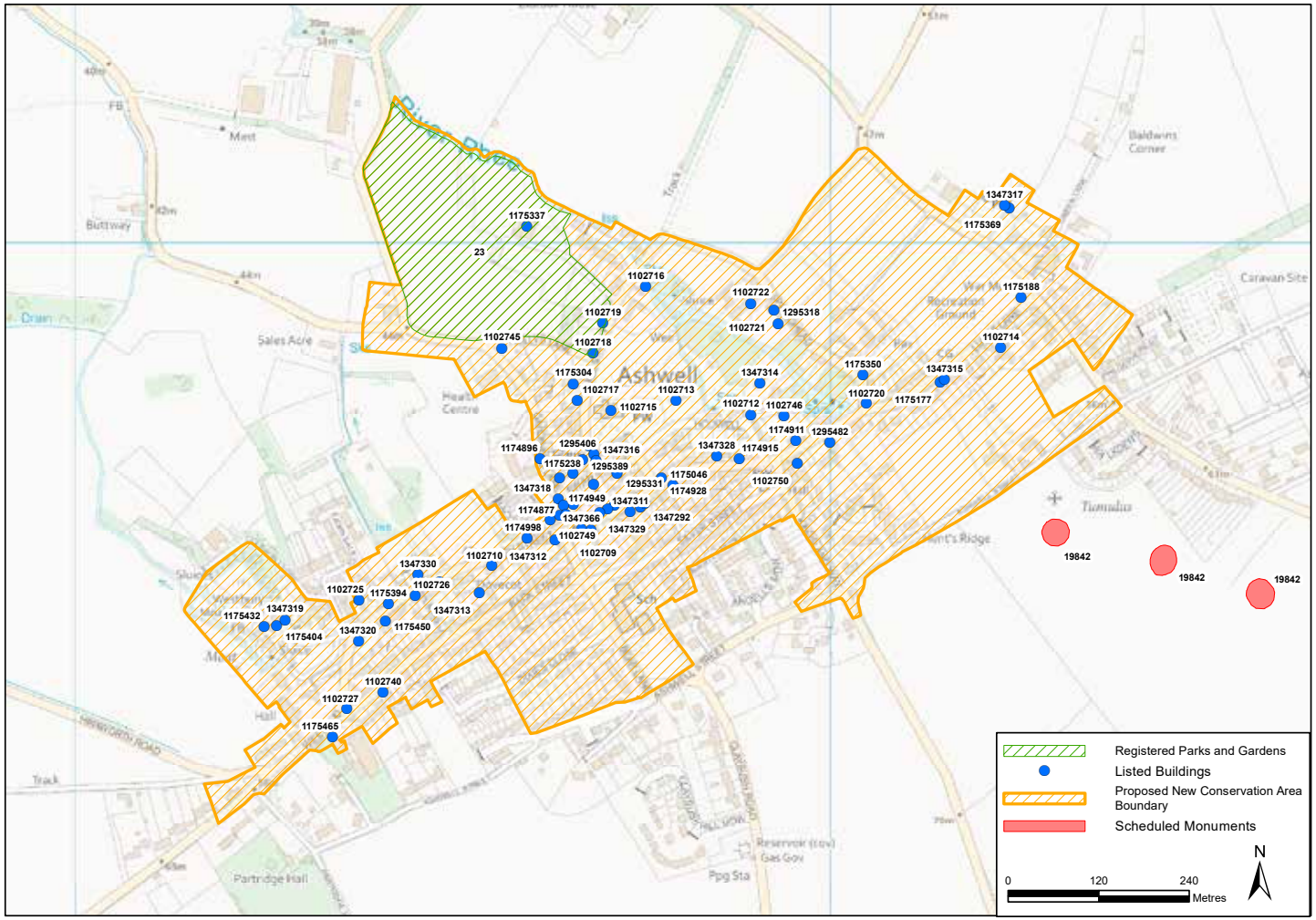

Figure 12: Map of the heritage assets within the proposed boundary for Ashwell Conservation Area

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2.6 Heritage at Risk

Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register identifies those sites that are most at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development. Every year the Heritage at Risk Register is updated and the register provides a picture of the sites most at risk and most in need of safeguarding for the future.

The Grade I listed Church of St Mary is on the Heritage at Risk Register. The condition is described as very bad and the building is considered a priority case. The church is considered to be at immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric and as of 2022, no solution has yet been found.

The primary issue is the dramatic decay to the clunch stone on the tower, and the north aisle roof covering is nearing the end of its life. However, the Parish Council has been working on project development with an Historic England, in order to shape and scope a new National Lottery Heritage Fund bid for financial assistance.

2.7 Archaeological Potential

Based on the evidence provided by the HHER and NHLE, there is potential for archaeological remains within the Conservation Area spanning multiple different periods.

In particular, the area of the village immediately to the east of the springs, most clearly the site at Hunts Close, has produced finds ranging in date from the Prehistoric to Medieval, including some particularly fine examples of metalwork and multiple coins. Such a concentrated collection of finds spanning such a length of time suggests intense and constant use of the area. The presence of a possible Romano-British temple at Hunts Close, with an associated Anglo-Saxon feature cut into it, possibly a ritual shaft, further highlights the importance of the area adjacent to the springs and suggests it's continued use may have a ritualistic connotation.

Certainly, the presence of a Neolithic henge monument, a long barrow and several ring-ditches all surrounding the village suggests Ashwell sits within a significant prehistoric ritual landscape. This ritual landscape continues into the Early Roman period, with the highly important feasting site at Ashwell End dedicated to the goddess Senuna (see Section 2.1), which, may have linguistical links to the tributary arising from the springs at Ashwell (latterly called the River Rhee). Given the evidence presented above, the presence of further prehistoric (and later) ritual sites and/or associated finds within the conservation area, particularly from the area adjacent to the springs, is considered likely.

Ashwell Street, the southern boundary of the conservation area, seems likely to have been a Roman road, and the multiple Roman building remains either excavated or identified by cropmarks in close proximity to the village prove the area was occupied in the Roman period. Accordingly, there is the potential for further Roman activity within the conservation area, particularly to the south of the conservation area along Ashwell Street.

The Domesday book clearly suggests the presence of an Anglo-Saxon settlement at Ashwell. Whether this is located in proximity to the possible ritual hollow/sunken-featured building and finds recovered from Hunts Close, or, as postulated by the HHER, to the north of the village at Ashwell End, is unclear, and could only be proven by further archaeological investigation. Regardless, it certainly seems likely that the location of the Anglo-Saxon precursor to the medieval village is located somewhere within the extent of the conservation area.

Archaeological remains of a medieval date are likely to be widespread in

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the Conservation Area, particularly clustered around the church and the High Street, as attested to by the still standing listed buildings of a late medieval date. It seems likely that some of the surviving post-medieval buildings would have had medieval predecessors, and evidence for these may still exist throughout the historic core of the village. The medieval moated site of Westbury Farm, at the western end of the conservation area, has already had two archaeological investigations carried out within its extents or in close proximity that exposed high-status medieval remains. If any further archaeological investigation was carried out in this area it would have a high probability of encountering similar remains.

Not unexpectedly, post-medieval remains are likely to be the most numerous within the conservation area. These would likely include evidence of domestic and commercial activity and would be focused within the plots on the High Street and Swan Street, likely interspersed and cutting into earlier, medieval, remains of a similar nature. Certain locations in the village, including Whitby Farmstead, the burial ground of the Quaker meeting house and the two breweries, are likely to contain more specific archaeological remains.

In summary, the archaeological potential of the Ashwell conservation area should be considered medium-to-high from the prehistoric period through to the Medieval. The likelihood of further regionally important archaeological remains surviving within the village is substantial, and the archaeological investigations already undertaken within, or near to, the conservation area have uncovered remains and finds that serve to support this theory.

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3. Assessment of Significance

3.1 Summary

Ashwell Conservation Area is large, covering much of the village and has relatively densely developed areas. The early historic core is centred around the church, while outlying farmsteads from this period also survive. Areas of development and growth from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can also be perceived. Overall, the character of the village is a coherent one, but nevertheless it can be divided into a number of key areas that illustrate the historic development of Ashwell. A selection of key views within the Conservation Area have been identified at the end of this section.

3.2 Character Areas

The Conservation Area has been sub-divided into four Character Areas. This division is based on an evaluation of the various attributes, characteristics and phases of development of each area. While in some cases different Character Areas may share attributes, such as a low density of development and open spaces, generally each area possesses a distinctive character. The four Character Areas and their overall character are as follows:

- Character Area 1 – Ashwell's Historic Core
- Character Area 2 – The Northern Rural Periphery And Ashwell Bury Estate
- Character Area 3 – Interwar Development
- Character Area 4 – Post-War Development

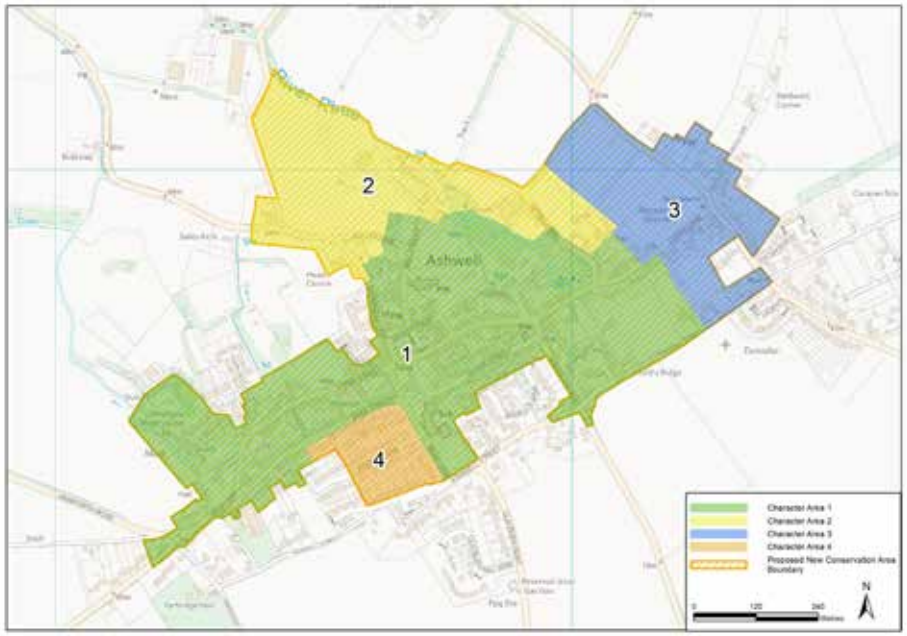

Figure 13: Map of the character areas within Ashwell Conservation Area

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The areas have been determined by building typology, historical development, land use and appearance. Many of the defining characteristics of each Character Area are present and repeated in other sections of the Conservation Area, which emphasises the local character and architectural significance of the Conservation Area. The following descriptions are not exhaustive, aiming instead to provide accessible accounts of each Character Area which will allow for an informed understanding of the Conservation Area's special interest and defining features.

Prevailing architectural styles, building materials, spatial planning, landscaping and boundary materials are detailed in the description of each Character Area to highlight the special architectural and historic value of the three zones. Photographs are included to aid the descriptions, providing examples where appropriate to inform the understanding of this document

With the exception of Character Area Four, each Character Area features designated heritage assets; a full list of the designations within the Conservation Area is included as Appendix 6.3 to this document. Designated buildings or structures which make a notable contribution to each Character Area are described in the following sections, however the omission of any buildings from the description does not mean they make no contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area. An assessment of the significance of each listed building and the contribution it makes to the special interest of the Conservation Area should be made when development or alterations are proposed.

Non-designated buildings or features deemed to reflect and enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area are also identified in the descriptions of each Character Area. These may be suitable for local listing; information regarding the definition of a non-designated heritage asset can be found in section 2.5 of this document. As with the listed structures, not all buildings that contribute to, or reinforce the character of the Conservation Area have been identified within this appraisal of the Conservation Area. Other buildings which feature architectural detailing typical of the Conservation Area, for example, would also be considered to contribute to the significance of the Conservation Area. Future development must be assessed on an individual basis, remaining considerate of Ashwell Conservation Area's special interest, with the aim to enhance or preserve those aspects which contribute to its significance.

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3.3 Character Area 1, Ashwell's Historic Core

Description

Character Area One is the historic core of the village of Ashwell and incorporates the main southwest to northeast thoroughfares of West End and High Street along with part of Lucas Lane. In addition, the lesser southwest-northeast routes of Back Street, Silver Street and the eastern end of Ashwell Street are included. These routes form the long spine of the village, from which the shorter north-south routes radiate or cross. These north south routes include Kingsland Way and Bear Lane on the southern side of the village and Alms Lane, Church Lane, Gardiners Lane, Mill Street and Spring Head to the north. The High Street is the primary thoroughfare through Ashwell and it is where most of the village's shops and public houses are located.

The earliest part of Ashwell is centred around the Church of St Mary, to the north of High Street [Figure 15]. The church dominates the settlement, providing a prominent communal and spiritual way-marker, being visible in multiple views whilst traveling through the village. There is a high density of buildings within this core at the south end of Mill Street, Swan Street and to the High Street. Here the many timber-framed buildings indicate a more urbanised pattern of development. At the western end of High Street, this form changes and there are examples of less densely packed timber-framed farmhouses. These farmstead settlements, such as Dixies Farmhouse, Woodlands, the barn range at Farrows and Westbury Farmhouse were originally, and more or less remain, on the periphery of the village.

To the rear of buildings on the High Street, particularly on its southern side, a more utilitarian character can be found, with courtyard developments and the remnants of farm complexes. Some modern infill development has occurred on the High Street, which is mostly unsympathetic to the character of the area, due to their inappropriate form and materials. At the eastern end of the High Street is the site of



Figure 14: High Street, looking east



Figure 15: The Lychgate, St Mary's Church



Figure 16: Ashwell Springs

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Figure 17: West End, looking east toward High Street



Figure 19: Swan Street



Figure 18: The High Street, looking east



Figure 20: Kingsland Way

Ashwell Springs, the source of the River Rhee, one of the tributaries of the Cam [Figure 16]. The wooded site is open to the public and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Layout and Land Usage

The Character Area is linear in form, focussed on the High Street [Figure 18] which runs east-west, and parallel streets, Back Street and Silver Street. A small section of West End, at the western end of the village is also included, as are splinter routes which run north-south and adjoin the High Street such as Bear Lane and Gardiner's Lane. Built form is predominantly built along the spine routes of the High Street and Back Street, with minimal infill. Where infill has occurred, this is typically on the site of now demolished farmsteads, creating small cul-de-sacs such as Bacon's Yard.

At its eastern end, the Character Area includes Ashwell Springs, which is framed by the looping form of Mill Street. Here the centre of the village splits away from the High Street, with the parish church of St Mary located north of the High Street, on Mill Street. The land within Character Area One is predominantly developed with commercial and residential buildings. While the High Street is the main commercial centre of Ashwell, it also has residential dwellings from a variety of periods.

Landscaping and Open Spaces

The area has some modest but notable open spaces, including the site of Ashwell Springs and the churchyard of St Mary and the adjacent paddock and Dixies Meadow (known locally as the 'Donkey Field'). Ashwell Springs is largely wooded over its 0.3 hectare extent and has public footpaths. The area around Swan Street and Gardiners Lane has a more open character with a grass verge which hosts the village sign. The slightly more uncluttered character and grid-like pattern of houses on Swan Street and Alms Lane are a remnant of the presence of an early marketplace.

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Key Buildings

Designated

There are fifty-six listed buildings within the Character Area. The list entry number and listing Grade for each building are included in Appendix 6.3. All listed buildings contribute to the historic interest of the Conservation Area, but those of particular note are described below.

St Mary's Church and Lychgate [Figure 15]. Completed in 1381, the church is one of few stone buildings within the Conservation Area, built in clunch and flint rubble with some sections of red brick. The building's tower is particularly large and prominent throughout the village. The lychgate, separately listed, is timber framed.

Bear House, 77 High Street. A former farmhouse, the building is timber framed and features sections of exposed carved framing and a medieval arched doorway on its front elevation.

Woodlands, 110 High Street [Figure 21]. Occupying a prominent position on the High Street, Woodlands (formerly Ash Farm) is a timber framed building, re-faced in the Georgian period, with large sash windows inserted. Slightly set back from the road, the house has a small front garden and a one bay, single storey, front extension on its western end.

Ashwell Museum, Swan Street [Figure 18].Built as a shop and manor court room, the building features exposed timber framing and front jetty under its gabled roof. A later chimney stack has been added to the rear.

Jessamine House, 15 High Street. Built circa 1700 reusing framing from an earlier house, the building has a chequered red brick front and is two storeys in height with attic accommodation. Five bays wide with a central door, the house is an example of 'polite' architecture from the Georgian period.

57, 59 and 61 High Street [Figure 23]. Built as a Guildhall, the building has exposed timber framing at first floor level. An incredibly long building, it is seven bays wide and has a shop at ground floor level. Four shop, bay windows are present on the ground floor, underneath the building's jetty.



Figure 21: Woodlands, 110 High Street.



Figure 22: Ashwell Museum



Figure 23: 57, 59 and 61 High Street

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Figure 24: Ashwell United Reform Church



Figure 25: Kingsland Terrace



Figure 26: The Zoar Baptist Chapel



Figure 27: 86 and 88 High Street

Rose and Crown Public House and K6 Telephone Kiosk. A late fifteenth/early sixteenth century hall house with jettied cross wings, the pub is timber framed with a roughcast rendered exterior. Grade II* listed, the building's fabric and late medieval character are well preserved despite later eighteenth and nineteenth century alterations. The phone box, located at the front if the pub is Grade II listed, adapted to house a defibrillator.

Non-designated

There are numerous buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the Historic Core. Some of these are listed buildings but many are not. These undesignated heritage assets may be considered for inclusion within a local list in the future. At present there is no approved local list for Ashwell. Below are descriptions of just some of the notable, unlisted buildings which make a beneficial contribution to Character Area One. This list is not exhaustive and there are many other buildings of merit that it has not been possible to include.

The Ashwell United Reform Church [Figure 24] is on the site of an earlier chapel, which burnt down in the Great Fire of Ashwell of 1850. The building stands on the corner of the High Street and Kingsland Way and is set back front the High Street by a small cemetery and has a brick-built boundary wall, cast iron gate and railings. The trees of the churchyard also make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area's character. The adjacent Church Hall is also nineteenth-century in date and similarly is a building of merit.

Kingsland Terrace [Figure 25]. At the northern end of Kingsland Way there are two rows of terraced cottages, on both west and east sides of the street. They are distinctive and share architectural details, although some modern alterations and additions have been undertaken. Despite

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this they retain their original character.

The Zoar Baptist Chapel, Gardiners Lane [Figure 26]. A brick built chapel, with a decorative bargeboard and a porch with an arched doorway. The building dates to 1851 and it is set back from the street by a small cemetery with a boundary wall. The windows have been unsympathetically replaced with uPVC, but the building retains its distinctive character contributes to the Conservation Area.

86 and 88 High Street, Cambridge Villas [Figure 27]. These semi-detached dwellings were built in 1892 and although later, they are similar in style to number 63 High Street. Each had a ground floor bay window and they share a projecting porch, which has original cast iron detailing above its cornice. There are original horned sash windows to the façade and a plaque on the porch proclaims the date and name of the villas.

Number 4, West End [Figure 28]. A nineteenth-century, brick-built house, set behind a small front garden with two bay windows and a fanlight above the front door. The building has its original sash windows.

83 Back Street, Bellbine Cottage [Figure 29]. This is a nineteenth-century rendered cottage with a tiled roof and timber casement windows. There is a single storey extension so the south and an outbuilding to the west, both also rendered and tiled. The cottage predates other nearby dwellings.

Dixies Barns [Figure 30]. Located between Back Street and High Street, this large complex of barns is shown on historic mapping of the late nineteenth-century. The buildings are arranged around a central courtyard and have been reused as commercial premises. The character and layout of the farm buildings has been substantially preserved and the site makes a positive contribution to the area's character.

The Adelong, 63 High Street. This two-storey, brick-built house was built in 1881 and has two bay windows in its façade, flanking the front recessed door, within a rounded brick arched opening, with decorative capitals. Above is a plaque with the house name and date. The building has timber sash windows, with horns to the upper sash, which are probably original.


Figure 28: Number 4, West End


Figure 29: 83 Back Street


Figure 30: Dixies Barns

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London House, 24 and 25 High Street. Built around 1875 and was constructed in local Arlesey White bricks with a slate roof. It was built as a pair of shops, with residential accommodation above and was once occupied by a grocers and drapers.

55-53 Silver Street, Bank Cottages. Two semi-detached, late nineteenth century dwellings. The brick detailing above doors and windows has been highlighted by red paint, but otherwise the buildings are of exposed yellow brick. The building has single-glazed timber sash windows and the timber front doors are also of some antiquity.

Brick Wall, Corner of Mill Street and Rollys Lane. A white brick boundary wall which contains an inscribed stone that states that the road was widened at that spot in 1837, with ground donated to the parish by the Merchant Taylor Company of London.

Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

The predominant roofing material in the High Street is handmade plain clay tiles, with natural slate also being widely used on nineteenth century buildings. Decorative ridge tiles can also be found on some nineteenth-century dwellings. Some late-twentieth century buildings





Figure 31: Examples of roof types within the Character Area. Top row left: offset chimneys. Second row left: decorative bargeboards. Bottom left: examples of tiled toofs. Top right hand side: example of a thatched cottage. Bottom right hand side: an example of slate.

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Figure 32: Examples of different wall materials within the Character Area . From left to right: Top Row Weatherboarding, flint and brick, timber Framing with sections of brick nogging and render infill. Middle Row, Rat Trap bond and grey brick, exposed timber with nogging, Flemish bond brickwork. Bottom row, exposed timber-framing with lime render, pargetting, rendered and jettiedhouse

have less appropriate, modern manufactured roofing materials. In the backlands to the south of the High Street, weatherboarded buildings are roofed with either slate (for example Dixie's barns) or clay pantiles. There are also examples of thatched roofs in the historic core, notably at numbers 33 Chantry House and 39 West End

Gables facing the street are a recurring feature of the Character Area, while rooflights and dormer windows are not common. Brick chimneys of varying styles are to be found, with some examples having the upper part skewed, diagonal to the chimney stack.

Walls

The village's historic core contains the majority of Ashwell's timber-framed dwellings which date from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. There are many fine examples of exposed close studding, has elaborate decorative pargetting, while many other timber-framed houses are plastered and there are some examples of brick nogging infill. Jettied first floors are also common, with the feature being replicated in some later buildings.

An exposed brick finish is also common amongst the historic core's post medieval and modern buildings and walls. Red bricks are widely used, although Gault bricks and local Arlesey White bricks are also often found, primarily on mid-to-

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late nineteenth century buildings. These vary in colour from a pale yellow to buff, with occasional pink hues. Flemish bond is widespread and decorative brick detailing is also common. Rat trap bond can also be found, away from the centre in Back Street.

While far less frequent than brick, there are some examples of stone as a building material within the Conservation Area, with flintwork being most prevalent. Stone and flint are used on both buildings and boundary walls, with the Church of St Mary's being the most prominent stone structure in the village. Flint is occasionally used in combination with brickwork on buildings, with brick used as dressings for doors and windows.

Black timber weatherboarding was traditionally used for functional outbuildings, such as agricultural buildings in rural areas. In more urbanised settlements, it was also used on storage and light industrial or manufacturing buildings. Typically, in Ashwell there are weatherboarded buildings in the backlands, behind properties fronting the main streets of the village, while there are also examples on the margin with the countryside. White painted weatherboarding, traditionally used on domestic dwellings, is not prevalent in the village's historic core.

Many of the historic timber framed buildings within the village core are rendered, with some examples of decorative pargetting. Render has also been added to some nineteenth century brick buildings and can also be found on modern dwellings. White is the most common colour but there are also off-whites, yellows, and cream painted renders.

Windows and Doors

Character Area One has numerous buildings with architectural or decorative details, which contribute positively to the area's character. A good quantity of traditional timber sash and mullion windows survive, with many eighteenth and nineteenth century examples. High quality joinery, architraves and historic shop windows are also present, as are leaded lights and historic metal window frames.

There are also examples of surviving medieval windows, with a stone example at Chantry House 33 West End and two timber examples and a timber door with arched door head at Bear House, 77 High Street. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century front doors and doorways front the High Street.

Away from the High Street, in areas of nineteenth-century development, Victorian period details are naturally more common. Timber bargeboards are also present, with both simple and decorative examples. There



Figure 33: Examples of windows and doors in Character Area One

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Figure 34: Grade II listed K6 Telephone Kiosk



Figure 35: Village sign, Carters Pond

are occasional examples of porch canopies, which are of timber and quite ornate.

Boundary Treatments

There are a few examples of cast iron decorative detailing, along with iron railings, which enhance the character of the area.

Brick walls, picket fences and close boarded fences are typical rear boundary treatments. Hedgerow is also a feature, giving the Character Area a green appearance.

Many properties front directly onto the street, meaning they have no front boundary.

Public Realm

The site of Ashwell Springs is the largest undeveloped public space and covers 0.3 hectares. It is a SSSI and consists of a series of freshwater springs, which form a source for the River Cam, with the waters being surrounded by trees and grasses, providing shade. There is access to the High Street and there are public footpaths across the site. The springs are situated at a lower level from the adjacent road, and it is possible to look down onto them from the High Street.

There is a Grade II listed K6 Telephone Kiosk outside The Rose and Crown Public House on the High Street, positioned next to a letter box [Figure 34].

Grass verges around Swan Street and Gardiners Lane, near the village Museum, provide an area of open space and it is here that Ashwell Cottage Garden and the village sign are located [Figure 36]. This area is likely to have once been the site of the medieval marketplace. Not far to the north, the churchyard of St Mary's provides another important public space.

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3.4 Character Area 2, The Rural Edge and Ashwell Bury Estate

Description

The northern edge of the Conservation Area has a far less dense development and includes the open spaces of Ashwell Bury Park and Garden [Figure 37]. This area was, and remains, the northern edge of the village. Buildings here were often traditionally concerned with agricultural production or industry. The River Cam flows through the area, from its source at Ashwell Springs to the south.

The seventeenth century Grade II listed former Mill is located on the River Cam at the Junction of Mill Street and Fordham Close. The area by the river the original site of the Fordham's Brewery (now closed) and despite modern development in Fordham Close, some brewery buildings survive. The area extends to the east to include the agricultural buildings and farmstead of Ringstead Farm. To the west the area extends to Ashwell Grange. There are important views that can be appreciated within this Character Area, looking into the centre of the village and the Church of St Mary.

Layout and Land Usage

The Character Area includes the northern section of Mill Street, a curving road which frames Ashwell Spring (the southern part of the street is in Character Area One). Away from the village centre, Mill Street becomes more open and less developed as it rises north then turns ninety degrees to the east. Here, Mill Street takes on the appearance of a country lane, with the converted barns of Ringstead Farm, prominent within the street scape, situated within agricultural fields. A small section of Rollys and Gardiners Lanes are also within Character Area Two, leading out from the centre of the village into the countryside to the north.

The Character Area is dominated by the house and estate at Ashwell Bury which are in private ownership. The permeability of the estate's boundary allows views into the estate, where Ashwell Bury House can be appreciated within


Figure 36: Mill Street


Figure 37: Ashwell Bury


Figure 38: Springhead, looking toward Character Area One

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its garden setting. The estate is partially in agricultural use, being used for cattle pasture.

Ashwell Mill, located at the turn in Mill Street, is strategically placed and important part of how the Character Area developed.

Landscaping and Open Spaces

Although not publicly accessible, Ashwell Bury's estate dominates the northern section of the Character Area, marking the village's gradual transition into the surrounding agrarian landscape.

The Character Area has a feeling of openness, due to the loose grain of built form and general lack of development in this section of Ashwell. Landscaping is generally informal, with fields marked by hedgerow and estate fencing.

Key Buildings

Designated

There are eight listed buildings within the Character Area. Character Area Two does not have the same concentration of listed buildings as Character Area One, due to its lower building density and position on the village edge.

Ashwell Bury. A Grade II listed building within a Grade II registered park and garden, Ashwell Bury is a small country house designed by celebrated architect Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1922-26. Built in brick, it has a classical design, with a central Doric doorcase. Lutyens also designed much of the interior, including two fireplaces.

Ducklake [Figure 40].The Grade II* listed at the north end of Springhead is timber framed with roughcast rendered walls.

The Mill [Figure 41] Grade II listed, the Mill and Mill house have been combined to form a single dwelling. Extended in 1973, the original Mill House is at the southern end of the building.

Chain Cottage. The eighteenth-century, Grade II listed, timber-framed cottage is perhaps one of the earliest buildings in the area and it is rendered and whitewashed, with a thatched



Figure 39: Example of fencing and hedgerow within the Character Area



Figure 40: Ducklake



Figure 41: The Mill

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roof.

Non-designated

This list of buildings below is not exhaustive and there are many other buildings of merit that it has not been possible to include.

Mill Street Stable and Coach House [Figure 42]. Opposite the gates of Ashwell Bury and to the south of the listed Mill on Mill Street is an unlisted, former stables and coach house building. It is built of white bricks in Flemish bond and set back within a yard, behind a white brick wall and has recently been converted to residential use. The building has a cross wing at either end, with timber, vents to the roof and a central cupola. The building may have served Ashwell Bury or the Fordham Brewery.

Number 47 Mill Street [Figure 43]. This late-nineteenth century dwelling is built of white brick, with a tiled roof. The building has its original timber windows have depressed brick arches above.

Former Brewery Building, Fordham Close [Figure 44]. This nineteenth century building has been converted to residential use and is built of white brick in Flemish bond, with a slate roof.

Ashwell Grange. A large, nineteenth-century dwelling, which can be viewed from West End and the Historic Core of Ashwell (Character Area One). It is built of white brick, a clay tile roof and has original sash windows.

Ringstead House, 18 Springhead. This is a large late-nineteenth century, brick-built house, with decorative lintels and stringcourses, set behind a white brick wall.

Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

Slate, pantile, plain tile and thatch can all be found in Character Area Two. The barn buildings on Mill Street have a mixture of pantile roofs and slate roofs, both of which are typical for agricultural buildings. Dwellings, particularly


Figure 42: Mill Street Stables and Coach House


Figure 43: 47 Mill Street


Figure 44: Former Brewery Building, Fordham Close

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those of the late nineteenth century have slate or handmade clay plain tile roofs.

Chimneys are a prominent feature of the Character Area, with many dwellings featuring multiple stacks. Chimney pots have, nevertheless, been lost on many properties.

Walls

Red bricks in Flemish bond are used on the Grade II listed Mill (along with weatherboarding and roughcast render). However, Arlesey White bricks are more common in this area also in Flemish bond, being used on later nineteenth-century dwellings, boundary walls and the surviving brewery building on Fordham Close. Ashwell Bury is also built in white bricks and rendered in white cement.

The barns at Ringstead Farm on Mill Street are also timber framed [Figure 45], with a black weatherboarded cladding, typical of agricultural buildings. The agricultural character of the barns has been retained during conversion to residential use.

Render is a common material, with the twentieth century dwellings on Fordham Close, rendered a mixture of white render and white brick.

Windows and Doors

There are a number of prevailing window types within the Character Area, with casement windows being the most common followed by sash windows. Casement windows are a mixture of metal and timber, with sash windows all timber. Many houses feature casement windows with leaded panes, which, due to their single glazed appearance, give an attractive pattern of light reflection. uPVC windows are not a common feature and, where present, incongruous due to their materiality.

Pentice boards and wooden windowsills are most common, with bell mouth render detail not a common feature. Dormer windows are a feature of older properties which have had attic accommodation added; where present, dormer windows feature gabled roofs.

Doors vary in style, subject to the property on which they are located. Traditionally styled panelled doors, where present are a positive element. Fanlights, side lights or glazed doors are not a common feature and incongruous where present.

Boundary Treatments

Within Character Area Two the use of post and rail fencing, such as that of the boundary of Ashwell Bury Park and Garden helps to



Figure 45: Example of weatherboarding, Ringstead Farm



Figure 46: Boundary wall, Springhead

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enhance the open, rural character. Hedges of native species are also contributors to this character. Elsewhere, white and red brick walls can be found, with Flemish bond predominating. Brick-built walls will often have decorative copings and cap stones on brick gate posts.

Public Realm

Public realm is limited, given the agrarian quality of the Character Area. However, the verdant nature of treelined avenues, verges and hedgerows contribute positively to the character of the area. There are also examples of streetlights which reinforce the historic character of the Conservation Area and, where present, contribute positively to the overall character of the street scene.



Figure 47: Mill Street, looking east



Figure 48: Rolly's Lane looking east

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3.5 Character Area 3, Interwar Development

Description

Character Area Three encompasses a section of early-twentieth century development, which saw development spread east from the village centre in Character Area One. Within Character Area Three there is the large, municipal open space of the Recreation Ground, which has a pavilion and is an important recreational space for residents of Ashwell.

The early-twentieth century civic character of the area is further enhanced by the nearby cemetery on Station Road [Figure 49] and its unlisted chapel. The cemetery contains two Grade II listed tombs, by Sir Edwin Lutyens and is laid out with cruciform footpaths. Lutyens designed the original layout, and his plans are held at Ashwell Museum. The cemetery's first interment was in 1918. The village's War Memorial, also on Station Road, adds to the sense of seclusion and reflection that is felt throughout the Character area, on the fringes of the village [Figure 50]. Within the southern section of the Character Area, a section twentieth century housing reinforces the appearance of this section of the village. A small strip of agricultural field is also included at the very southern section of the Character Area, due to the high value archaeological remains present in this field.



Figure 49: The Cemetery, Station Road



Figure 50: The War Memorial, Station Road

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Layout and Land Usage

Land use in Character Area Three is mixed, split between recreational space, a cemetery and areas of housing. Production at the former industrial buildings of the Maltings ceased in the 1970s and the building has been converted to residential use. The civic nature of the area survives in the form of the recreation ground, the War Memorial and the cemetery.

Landscaping and Open Spaces

Character Area Three has notable public spaces in the form of the Recreation Ground [Figure 51], which contains a children's playground, as well as the Cemetery. The recreation ground is well maintained and overlooked by surrounding dwellings, making it an important part of the village. Ashwell Street to the south of the area [Figure 52] provides an east-west route and visual links to the surrounding setting of fields, beyond the Conservation Area boundary.

Key Buildings

Designated

For details of all the listed buildings in Character Area Three, see Appendix 6.3.

The oldest building in Character Area Three is the Grade II listed 34 Lucas Lane opposite the Recreation Ground, which is a timber framed and roughcast rendered, seventeenth-century house

Non-designated

The list of buildings below is not exhaustive and there are many other buildings of merit that it has not been possible to include.

Former Maltings, Station Road [Figure 53]. Built in 1902 by Fordham, the industrial building provides evidence for Ashwell's connections to the brewing industry. The building has been converted to residential use, but its distinctive industrial character remains. The building has been converted to residential use.



Figure 51: The Recreation Ground



Figure 52: Ashwell Street. The scheduled monument is in the field to the left



Figure 53: Former Fordham Maltings, Green Lane/Station Road

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To the south on Station Road are a small group of semi-detached dwellings on the western side of the road, which were built shortly before 1914. On the eastern side of Station Road are large, later semi-detached council dwellings [Figure 54]. These were built in the early 1920s under a government initiative to build 'Homes fit for Heroes' after the First World War. New standards were set for building quality and facilities, such as a bath in every house and the buildings were designed to be economical and pleasant to live in. The examples on Station Road have more generous proportions that the earlier dwellings, with long garden plots to the rear and generous front gardens. The inter-war housing continues outside of the Conservation Area boundary, but the best preserved examples, which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area are those running south from the junction of Lucas Lane up to Philosophers Gate.

Station Road is an important route into the village and the buildings and the War Memorial are key gateway buildings into the Conservation Area.

The Cemetery Chapel, Station Road [Figure 55]. The small chapel is built in an Arts and Crafts style, with little ornamentation. It was designed by Sir Albert Richardson in the 1930s, post-dating the establishment of the cemetery. It is built of brick, painted white and has a ceramic tiled roof. The porch is supported by narrow Tuscan columns and the windows have leaded lights.

The Elms, 36 Lucas Lane. A late-nineteenth century dwelling built in red brick in Flemish bond. It retains its original, horned sash windows.

The Cricketers, 32 Lucas Lane. A rendered cottage fronting directly onto Lucas Lane, with a slate roof and timber windows. Its appearance and position suggest it may be of some antiquity and a building in this location is depicted on the late-nineteenth century mapping.

The Recreation Ground Pavilion [Figure 56]. A white timber weatherboarded building with a slate roof. There is a central gable supported by timber columns, flanked by wings on either side.


Figure 54: Station Road, looking north


Figure 55: The Cemetery Chapel


Figure 56: The Recreation Ground's Pavillion

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Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

Slate is common throughout the Character Area, although all of the inter-war dwellings have ceramic roof tiles.

Chimneys are an important part of the street scene, punctuating the roofscape and adding visual interest.

There is a mixture of roof types within the Character Area, however the repetition of roof forms on Station Road creates a homogenous appearance to the street scene.

Walls

Render is used on later buildings along Lucas Lane, as is red brick in Flemish bond [Figure 58]. The Maltings and the very earliest twentieth-century semi-detached cottages are built in white Arlesey brick, with some examples having been subsequently rendered. The larger inter-war houses are all rendered, generally with a smooth finish, but with some roughcast examples also [Figure 59].

Slate is often used on roofs, although all of the inter-war dwellings have ceramic roof tiles. Boundary treatments include low panel fences, picket fences and hedges. Occasionally brick-built walls to front gardens can be found on Lucas Lane.

Windows and Doors

Casement windows are most common throughout the Character Area. In many cases, buildings have lost their original windows, having been fitted with uPVC double glazed units. Where present, glazing bars are



Figure 58: Example of brickwork used for walls and timber sash windows



Figure 59: Example of 1920s housing 'fit for heroes', Station Road

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Figure 60: The Recreation Ground

typically surface mounted in these units which is atypical compared to elsewhere in the Conservation Area, but does help to preserve some of the character of the buildings' original appearance.

There are a variety of window surrounds, with some houses featuring arched brick lintels and others featuring pentice boards.

Doors are predominantly opaque and panelled, with a few examples of glazed doors scattered throughout the Conservation Area. Porches are not common, nor are canopied entranceways.

Boundary Treatments

Boundary treatments within the Character Area are typical for the Conservation Area. Hedgerow is common, as are sections of low-lying fencing or brick walls. Close boarded fencing is the dominant boundary choice for rear gardens.

Public Realm

The Recreation Ground [Figure 60] and the cemetery are important public areas and in addition, the War Memorial at the junction of Station Road and Lucas Lane is a significant public monument [Figure 50]. There is a lack of street furniture and signage which contributes to the sense of openness. Pavements occasionally give way to grass verges, such as that on the north side of Lucas Lane adjacent to the Recreation Ground and on the north section of Station Road by the Cemetery.

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3.6 Character Area 4, Post-war Development

Description

Character Area Four is a section of post-war housing to the south of Back Street, on Dixies Close [Figure 61] and Ashwell Street. The development retains its uniformity and can be perceived as a distinctive, cohesive phase of Ashwell's development.

The buildings and block plan of properties in Character Area Four are typical of the national post-war housebuilding programme, with each house benefitting from generous gardens. The dwellings are generally semi-detached, with some examples of terraces of three dwellings on Ashwell Street and flats on the western end of Dixies Close.



Figure 61: Dixies Close

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Layout and Land Usage

Houses in the Character Area are built south of Back Street, on what was once agricultural land. Bear Lane runs north south and takes its name from Bear House, on the High Street. It forms the eastern edge of the Character Area.

Dixies Close is central to the development, framed by houses on either side. A further row of houses, which back onto the gardens of houses on Dixies Close, front Ashwell Street.

Land use is exclusively residential; the allotment gardens at the western side of Dixies Close are excluded from the Conservation Area. Flat roofed garages infill side gaps between properties, however their low height and roof profile maintains sky gaps between buildings. As the topography rises to the south, the dwellings on the southern side of Dixies Close are in an elevated position [Figure 62].

Landscaping and Open Spaces

At the entrance to Dixies Close, grass verges frame the street, creating a green entrance to the cul-de-sac [Figure 63]. Trees are present on these verges, as well as hedgerow, and create a sense of verdant openness which highlight the homogeneity of the street scene, drawing the eye along Dixies Close. Hedges to front gardens are common and enhance the green character of the area [Figure 64].

The set back of properties behind large front gardens on Dixies Close emphasises this feeling of openness, despite the suburban nature of the street scene.

Planting along Bear Lane is dense, allowing the lane to retain a historic character, emphasised by its narrowness and the lack of pedestrian provision. Trees and hedgerow, along with the steep bank on the western side of the lane, replicates other routes leading out of the Conservation Area in other Character Areas.

Further tree planting and a green at the junction of Ashwell Street and Bear Lane add to the green appearance of the Character Area, lessening the contrast between this section of


Figure 62: Dixies Close, looking south east


Figure 63: T he Green at the junction of Dixies Close and Bear Lane


Figure 64: Hedges on Ashwell Street

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the Conservation Area and Character Area One which, without the planting, would seem a particularly stark, incongruous addition.

Key Buildings

There are no listed buildings within the Character Area. Due to the block plan and layout of the Character Area, buildings on corner plots are particularly prominent, especially as there are no terminating buildings located at the western end of either Dixies Close or Ashwell Street.

Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

Roofs are exclusively covered in brown plain tiled roofs, adding to the sense of homogeneity and consistency throughout the Character Area [Figure 66].

Chimneys are present on the centre and flank walls of buildings, typically featuring short, squat chimney pots. Where chimney stacks or chimney pots have been removed, this detracts from the visual rhythm of the roofscape.

Walls

The Character Area largely consists of Airey houses, which were built using prefabricated concrete structural elements, clad with shiplap concrete panels. Longevity was not a concern, and they were intended to be a cheap, speedy solution to the shortage of houses in the post war period. The examples on Dixies Close in Character Area Four have been successfully reclad in red/brown brick in stretcher bond, which has ensured their survival [Figure 67]. A contrasting band of dark brick above the ground floor lintels and underneath the windows sills break up the appearance of the brick work, which, due to the colour and material nature, would otherwise look monotonous and flat.

Windows and Doors

Windows on all buildings within the Character Area are casement windows with top or side hung opening elements. There is a variety of window sizes, with some homes featuring


Figure 66: Brown plain tiled roofs within the Character Area


Figure 67: Brickwork with a decorative band


Figure 68: Canopies on Dixies Close

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tripartite windows. All buildings have lost their original windows and feature uPVC double glazed replacements, some with trickle vents and surface mounted glazing bars.

Doors vary in style, with some featuring large sections of glazing. Like the windows, uPVC or composite doors are dominant. Some houses on Dixies Close feature side lights next to their front door, allowing additional light into hallways. Mono-pitched, lean-to porch canopies are present over the front entrances to some houses [Figure 68] but generally porches are not a feature of the Character Area. Flat canopies are present on some houses on Ashwell Street.

Boundary Treatments

There is a sense of space to the development on Dixies Close, with grass verges and open front garden plots. Where front garden boundaries exist, they are low picket fences, brick walls or hedges [Figure 70].

Public Realm

There are small areas within the public realm at the eastern edge of Dixies Close and on Ashwell Street. There is a bench on the green on Ashwell Street, offering an area of respite.

Streetlamps, where present, are green in colour and in a swan-necked heritage style with hanging lantern as per other character areas within Ashwell Conservation Area [Figure 69]. Trees and grass verges on the street scene create a sylvan, tranquil appearance to the street scene, whilst the changing land levels add visual variety to the street scene.



Figure 69: Vintage streetlamp on Dixies Close



Figure 70: Example of hedgerow boundary treatments in the Character Area

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3.7 Views

The views included in this assessment are just a selection of key views and are intended to demonstrate the type of views that can be gained from within the Conservation Area and from outside its boundary. This list is not exhaustive and there will be other views which contribute to how the significance of the Conservation Area is appreciated and understood. Any proposals for development within the Conservation Area, or beyond its boundary within its environs, should thus not only consider the views identified within this document but also any others which may be relevant or highlighted as part of a bespoke assessment of that proposal.

Due to its layout and areas of open space, the Conservation Area has a varying visual permeability. Within the Conservation Area long distance views as well as short views framed by buildings are possible. From outside the Conservation Area looking towards Ashwell, there are important views which allow the historic character of the settlement to be appreciated.

The locations of the numbered views reproduced here are shown on the views map on the following page [Figure 71].

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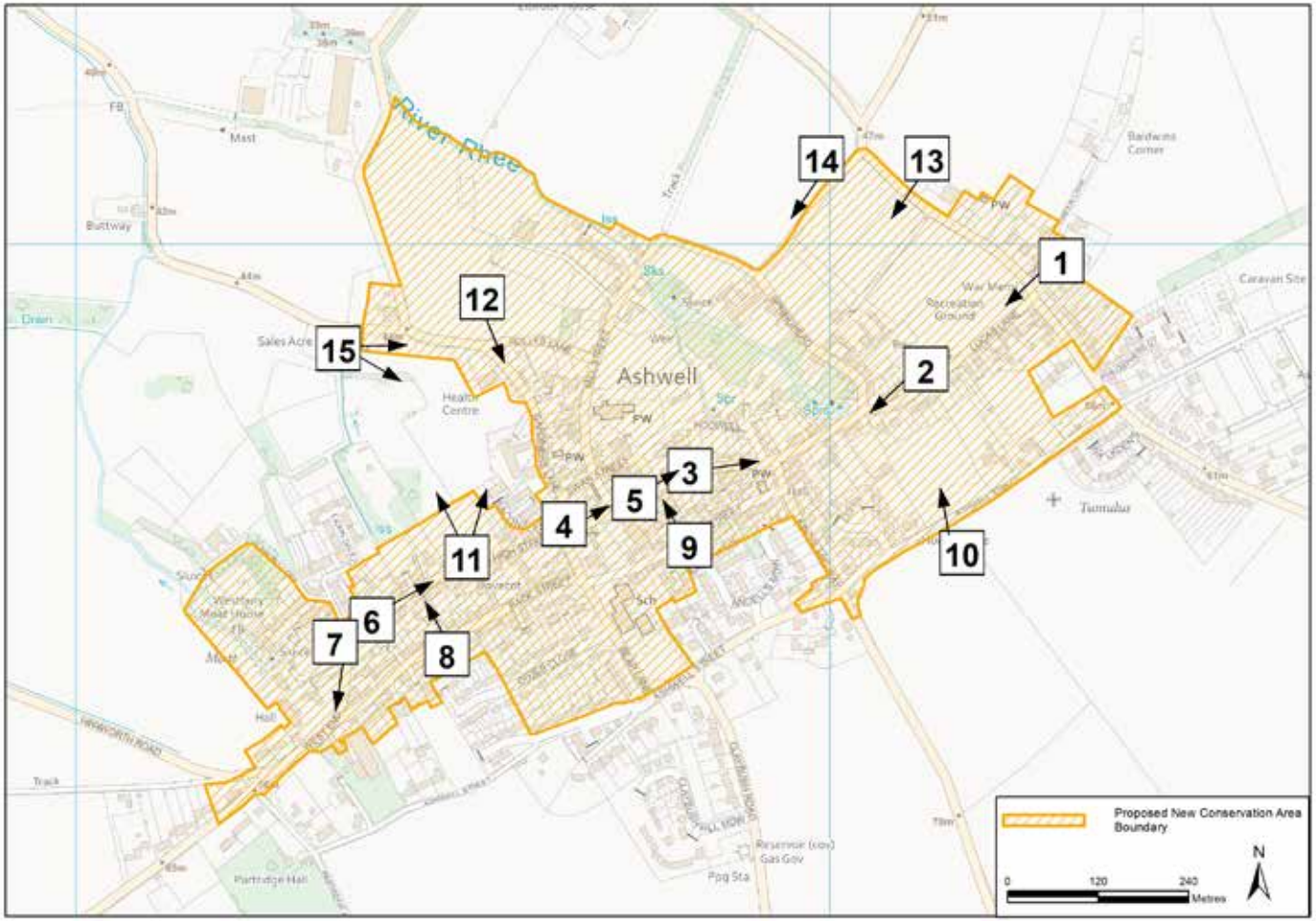

Figure 71: Views map, images of these views are reproduced in the following pages

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Views Within the Conservation Area

The main thoroughfare of Ashwell is composed of Lucas Lane to the east, which becomes the High Street, eventually becoming West End to the west. The kinetic views that can be experienced when traveling along this route demonstrate to the observer the successive variations in Ashwell's historic character and architecture.

The open nature of the eastern part of the Conservation Area with its Recreation Ground and War Memorial (Character Area Three) allows for long views, where the area's character and special interest can be appreciated [Figure 72].

In views along Lucas Lane, the gradual increase in density of buildings can be appreciated [Viewpoint 2, Figure 73]. On the High Street, again in both directions the Conservation Area's dense body of historic buildings of varying architectural styles can be easily perceived [Viewpoints 3,4 and 5, Figures 74, 75 and 76]

Views in both directions along West End continue to allow the changing built form and character of Ashwell to be easily perceived, with cottages and agricultural buildings sites on the periphery of the village. The dominance of the Church of St Mary can also be appreciated



Figure 72: Viewpoint 1, toward the War Memorial, Lucas Lane



Figure 73: Viewpoint 2, Lucas Lane



Figure 74: Viewpoint 3, The High Street



Figure 75: Viewpoint 4, The High Street

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along this route (Viewpoints 6 and 7).

The north/south routes through the Conservation Area provide views with a distinctive character. Historic buildings are framed by narrow alleys, such as Wilsons Lane, Bear Lane and Church Lane, the latter providing another view of the Grade I listed Church of St Mary [Viewpoints 8 and 9, Figures 77 and 78].

There are open spaces within the Conservation Area boundary some of which are of archaeological significance, which enable important views to be appreciated, such as the view north from Ashwell Street Figure 79, (Viewpoint 10), which looks down from higher ground to the village and its buildings below. Viewpoint 11 [Figure 80] from the High Street across Dixies Meadow provides important views of the Conservation Area, its open rural setting, along with views of St Marys Church spire. Viewpoint 12 [Figure 81] from the junction of Rollys Lane and Gardiners Lane provides an important view within the Conservation Area, where the church spire, traditional buildings and hedges provide a clear example of the Conservation Area's character.



Figure 76: Viewpoint 5, The High Street



Figure 77: Viewpoint 8



Figure 78: Viewpoint 9

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Views Outside the Conservation Area

The rural setting of the Conservation Area and the views it provides are important, positive elements that allow its historic special interest and character to be appreciated (the setting of the Conservation Area is discussed in section 3.2.6). From outside of the Conservation Area boundary, it is possible to appreciate the historic built form of the Ashwell settlement. Again, the church spire of St Mary's is a prominent feature in the landscape. In views from the northern part of Station Road [Figure 82, Viewpoint 13] and Mill Street [Figure 83, Viewpoint 14] the church spire, which pinpoints the heart of the village, can be appreciated, within the rural countryside.

Viewpoint 15 is located at a north-western entry point to the Conservation Area close to Ashwell Grange [Figure 84]. From this viewpoint the character of the Conservation Area and its setting can be appreciated. The spire of St Mary's Church is clearly visible, while there are also views over Dixies Meadow, which forms an important part of the Conservation Area's setting.



Figure 79: View 10, looking north from Ashwell Street



Figure 80: View 11, looking north from the High Street across Dixies Meadow



Figure 81: Viewpoint 12



Figure 82: Viewpoint 13



Figure 83: Viewpoint 14



Figure 84: Viewpoint 15

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3.8 The Setting of the Conservation Area

The setting of the Conservation Area is a contributor to its significance, allowing for the Conservation Area to be understood and appreciated. Setting is defined within the NPPF as:

> *The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral. (NPPF: Annex 2: Glossary).*

Along with its high-quality buildings of historic and architectural merit, the Ashwell Conservation Area derives significance from its historic settlement pattern. The agrarian landscape that surrounds the settlement of Ashwell has played a vital part in the evolution of this settlement pattern, the village's development and the economy of the community for many centuries. The quality of the surrounding rural landscape therefore makes an important contribution to the historic setting and significance of the Conservation Area.

There are many vantage points within the Conservation Area, where the open pastoral landscape of its setting can be viewed and experienced. The historic and rustic character of this setting is highly tangible and the enhancement it brings to the Conservation Area's significance, along with that of individual listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets is clear. The surrounding open landscape and fields have a direct historical and functional association with Ashwell village and the conservation area and the setting's surviving agrarian character, which is generally empty of modern development, greatly enhances its significance.

Revisions to the boundary of the Conservation Area have been undertaken



Figure 85: Dixies Meadow, north of the High Street, the undeveloped nature of this part of its setting enhances the Conservation Area



Figure 86: The view south from the open area of Elbrook and Cow Lane Meadows to the north of the Conservation area, taken from the public footpath 018.

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as a part of this appraisal, to ensure those areas designated fulfil the necessary criteria for designation (Section 2.3). The boundary revisions were undertaken to reflect the changing methodologies of good practice and provide a clearer strategy which acknowledges Ashwell's unique historic built environment. This review is line with the NPPF guidance on Conservation Areas (Paragraph 191).

Open areas and fields outside the edge of the village remain excluded as they do not have the necessary level of special architectural or historic interest. As part of the setting of the Conservation Area, the open and agrarian character of the surrounding fields and meadows greatly contributes to the understanding and appreciation of the Conservation Area's significance. The contribution made by setting is recognised in national policy and guidance.

For example, paragraph 206 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably. In addition, any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting, should require clear and convincing justification. (NPPF Paragraph 200).

There are many vantage points within the Conservation Area, where the open pastoral landscape of its setting can be viewed and experienced. The historic and rustic character of this setting is highly tangible and the enhancement it brings to the Conservation Area's significance, along with that of individual listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets is clear. The surrounding open landscape and fields have a direct historical and functional association with Ashwell village and the conservation area and the setting's surviving agrarian character, which is generally empty



Figure 87: The view of the Conservation Area's agricultural setting to the east, taken from Ashwell Cemetery



Figure 88: The undeveloped pasture that forms the setting north of Dixies Meadow, looking east near Ashwell grange and Rollys Lane

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of modern development, greatly enhances its significance.

Prehistoric human activity in the area has left its mark on Ashwell's setting. To the south of Ashwell Street is an open agricultural field [Figure 89], which contains archaeological deposits. The five ring ditches to the south of Ashwell Street are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (List UID: 1451703) and are protected in their own right. The open agricultural fields containing such historical landscape features are a positive element within the Conservation Area's setting and they enhance its significance.

Within Ashwell's setting are areas that are currently and were historically empty of development. They have had agricultural uses in the past, historically supporting the community of Ashwell (such as Dixies meadow, Elbrook Meadow and Cow Lane Meadow [Figures 85 and 86]. In general, the village is surrounded by a landscape which has a pronounced agrarian character, which allows an appreciation of the significance of the Conservation Area. The fields and meadows to the north and west of Ashwell Bury, to the north and northeast of Mill Street, Elbrook Meadow and Cow Lane Meadow and also to Dixies Meadow on the north side of High Street would be particularly sensitive to unsympathetic development. There are public footpaths around Ashwell which allow the Conservation Area to be viewed and appreciated within its setting, such as Footpath 018, which runs northeast from Mill Lane.



Figure 89: The field that forms the setting to the south of Ashwell Street, which contains five ring ditches

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4. Opportunities for Enhancement

The following key issues have been identified and are summarised below in brief. The list is in no way exhaustive, and neither are the issues identified unique to Ashwell Conservation Area, with many being shared with other conservation areas.

4.1 Access and Integration

Ashwell can be accessed through multiple routes, on foot or by vehicle. In many places entry to the Conservation Area is not discernible and better acknowledgment of the Conservation Area, either through signage, changes in streetscape features or markers would be beneficial. Interpretation boards and the creation of integrated approach, utilising uniform signage and specific lighting and paving throughout the Conservation Area, or Character Areas, would allow for improved public awareness.

4.2 Car Parking

Car parking is currently provided by roadside spaces, such as those on the High Street. Generally, although this is not ideal, this provision is perhaps adequate for the numbers of vehicles. However, the character of the area would benefit from a reduction in the practice of parking to the side of roads, particularly on the High Street.

4.3 Inappropriate Modern Development

There have been inappropriate modern developments within the Conservation Area. Many of these, such as infill developments on the High Street, date to the later twentieth-century and they are notable for their unfitting design, materials and fenestration. There are also more recent developments, which do not enhance the character and special interest of the Conservation Area. In particular, the development at Townsend Meadow was within the Conservation Area boundary and is now recommended for exclusion [Figure 90]. While the buildings at Townsend Meadow may be of good quality, their design is fairly repetitive, and the cul-de-sac development plan do not reflect the character of the Conservation Area.



Figure 90: Townsend Meadow development

As is stated in the NPPF, local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably (Paragraph 206). Therefore, for the future positive management of the Conservation Area, any new development should ideally enhance or at the very least, preserve the character or special interest of the Conservation Area. This

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can be achieved through appropriate layout, design, materials, form, size and landscaping. It would be necessary for any application for a new scheme to demonstrate that these aspects have been considered and that the character of the Conservation Area has been referenced in the new scheme.

4.4 Neutral Contributors

A significant proportion of buildings make a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The dilution of positive buildings amongst those which are neutral leads to an underwhelming and indistinctive overall character.

Windows and doors

The removal of traditional windows and doors has occurred in some instances within the Conservation Area. Most notably, in Character Area Four, where the original windows to the post-War housing, (probably originally of metal) have been entirely replaced with uPVC. However, in general, the High Street and other areas have retained a significant number of their historic timber doors and windows. The continued use of traditional, timber doors and windows and the preservation of those that exist at present, will ensure the character and special architectural interest of Ashwell Conservation Area will be conserved. The replacement of timer windows with inappropriate, modern, mass-produced examples, such as uPVC, will have a detrimental impact on the significance of the Conservation Area.

Meter boxes and other services

Additions to buildings within conservation areas, such as meter boxes, solar panels and car charging points can potentially result in harm to the area's character. For example, meter boxes have been added to the front of dwellings in Kingsland Terrace [Figure 91], which has had a detrimental impact on the character of the terrace, due to their incongruous appearance at odds with the traditional materiality of the terrace. With careful choices in terms of design, size, position, materials and colour, the negative impact resulting from such additions can often be reduced to a negligible level.



Figure 91: Meter boxes on Kingsland Terrace

The installation of unsympathetic additions to buildings in the Conservation Area, will dilute the historic Character of the area. Additions such as oversized extensions, poor quality materials, unsympathetic doors and windows, rooflights, extraction flues, TV aerials, satellite dishes, uncharacteristic modern porches, close-board or panel fences and inappropriate finishes to drives and paths.

A lack of maintenance of both public and private buildings, can detract from the quality of the Conservation Area. In general, Ashwell is well

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maintained, yet private dwellings can be susceptible to the risk of decay and continued engagement with landowners to sustain and improve the appearance of properties will be beneficial. Regular maintenance, including painting, cleaning and the clearance of vegetation should be promoted as a key component of preserving the quality of the Conservation Area.

4.5 Public Realm

Generally, there is not an over-abundance of road signage in the Conservation Area, which is beneficial. There are instances where road signs have been placed with a lack of sensitivity, such as the road signs outside the Grade II listed thatched cottage at 39 West End, which is at an entry point to the village and Conservation Area.

Street Furniture (Lampposts, benches, signage, bins, bike stands, bollards etc.)

There are some historic and decorative lamp posts which have been well looked after and their continued upkeep would ensure their beneficial contribution remains [Figure 92]. Fluted iron bollards can also be found on the High Street. Adjacent to the Rose and Crown on the High Street is a Grade II listed K6 red telephone box and a letter box from the reign of George VI, which enhance the area's character. Bins belonging to the domestic dwellings can be found, but they do not dominate the High Street. In areas away from the Hight Street, particularly in areas of terraces of dwellings where bins could be an issue, they are generally kept away from the main frontages.

Open Spaces

The open and green spaces in the Conservation Area make a positive contribution and are integral to its character in many instances, defining road junctions and passing places. The long-term maintenance needs of these spaces should be considered and, where appropriate, opportunities taken to enhance them and ensure access is maintained through roadside pathways and public rights of way.



Figure 92: Example of a heritage style lamp post which contributes positvely to the Ashwell Conservation Area

Trees and Planting

Appropriate levels of maintenance need to be ensured and, where required, opportunities for enhancement sought to maintain and manage the trees within the Conservation Area. There are opportunities to enhance the verdant appearance of the Conservation Area along periphery roads, reinforcing areas of hedgerow which feature gaps.

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5. Management Proposals

There are a wide range of issues facing the Ashwell Conservation Area, many of which share common themes. This section presents recommend management proposals for consideration, which could address these issues in both the short and long term . The adoption of any recommended measures would be subject to available resources and funding.

The delivery of these management proposals provide the opportunity for partnership working with key organisations, the Parish Council, landowners and the local community and would be subject to available resources and funding arrangements.

5.1 Positive Management: Short term

The first set of proposals relate to positive management and focus on good practice and improved ways of working with the local planning authority. These are generally low cost and can be implemented within a short timeframe, typically within one to three years.

Enforcement

Where the necessary permission has not been sought for alterations, such as advertising signage and building alterations which are not contained within the General Permitted Development Order, the Local Planning Authority's powers of enforcement should be considered. This could assist in reinstating any lost character or architectural features whose loss may have a negative cumulative effect on the Conservation Area, as well as avoiding a precedence being set for similar, uncharacteristic works.

General Maintenance: Public Realm and Highways

The mature trees within the Conservation Area, in places such as the Recreation Ground and Ashwell Springs make a positive contribution to its appearance and character. Although there are no trees on the densely packed High Street, the village has a distinctly green character away from the historic core. The implementation of Tree Preservation Orders will protect important trees, while trees within the Conservation Area that are not protected by an Order are protected by the provisions in section 211 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The Local Authority must be notified before carrying out certain work on such trees unless an exception applies.

Through the agreement of a standard good practice within the Conservation Area between relevant Local Authority teams and other landowners, long term goals can be set to promote good design within the public realm, such as avoiding excessive road markings or signage and agreeing a standard street furniture within Character Areas to ensure consistency over time as elements are introduced or replaced. This will have a long-term positive impact on the Ashwell Conservation Area and ensure the preservation of characteristic features of the area including historic lamp posts, bollards, letter boxes and the listed phone box (now used to house a defibrillator).

Heritage Statements, Heritage Impact Assessments and Archaeological Assessments

In accordance with the NPPF (Para.194), applicants must describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

All applications for one or more houses with a floor space of more than 100 square metres, proposed within the Conservation Area require an appropriately detailed Heritage Statement . Heritage statements are

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also required for any application relating to a Listed building. Large scale developments should also be accompanied by a design and access statement.

It is important to consider the importance of the setting of any heritage asset as part of any new proposal. A new development or change within the setting of the Conservation Area or a Listed Building will have the potential to alter the buildings significance or affect the ability to appreciate its significance. Heritage Statements, landscape and visual studies accompanying an application will help in the assessment of any impacts.

The key views analysed within this document are in no way exhaustive. The impact of any addition, alteration or removal of buildings, structures, trees or highways on key views should be considered to aid decision making. This includes development outside the conservation area. Where appropriate, views must be considered within Design and Access or Heritage Statements. This should be in accordance with Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2019).

Local Heritage List

A Local List identifies buildings and structures of local architectural and/or historic interest, and these are considered to be 'non-designated heritage assets' under the provisions of the NPPF. Local Lists can be beneficial in ensuring the upkeep and maintenance of historic buildings that contribute to the character of the settlements.

There is currently no local list for Ashwell. The exercise of creating a Register of Buildings of Local Interest (as per other settlements in the district) would also facilitate a greater understanding of the area and could be utilised as a public engagement strategy to improve awareness and understanding.

Within this document, buildings of merit have been identified as non-designated heritage assets within each Character Area. These identified buildings should form the basis of any local list, although a complete survey of the village, excluding buildings outside the Conservation Area, should be conducted. The non-designated heritage assets identified in this document is therefore not a full or exhaustive list.

Non-designated heritage assets are defined in the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) as buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified by plan-making bodies as having a degree of heritage significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which do not meet the criteria for designated heritage assets. They can therefore be below-ground archaeological remains as well as above ground structures or places.

Neutral Elements

There are buildings that make a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the Ashwell Conservation area. These will serve to dilute the contribution of positive buildings over time and can result in an underwhelming and indistinctive overall character. Any new development should not simply aim to have a neutral impact on the area but actively make a positive one. Applications to change the appearance of existing neutral buildings will allow more appropriate materials to be used and therefore, it may be possible to bring some enhancement to the area's character through the planning process.

North Herts Council must not allow for the quality of design to be 'averaged down' by the neutral and negative elements of the built environment. Officers must where possible seek schemes which enhance the built environment and look to conserve and reinstate historic features. It is

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also considered that poor-quality or unsympathetic schemes should not be allowed, both within the Conservation Area and its setting.

New Development

To be successful, any future development needs to be mindful of the local character of the Conservation Area, while at the same time addressing contemporary issues such as sustainability. Any scheme for new development of any size within Ashwell and its setting, should seek to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area as a core design aim.

Successful new development will:

- Relate to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land,
- Sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it (including public footpaths)
- Respect important views,
- Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings,
- Use materials and building methods which as high in quality of those used in existing buildings, and
- Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of their setting.

North Herts Council should guide development in a positive manner by:

- Engaging with developers at an early stage through the Pre-Application Process to ensure modern development is high quality in design, detail and materials.
- Ensuring medium-large scale development schemes are referred to a CABE Design Review (or similar) to ensure that new buildings, additions and alterations are designed to be in sympathy with the established character of the area. The choice of materials and the detailed design of building features are important in making sure it's appropriate to a conservation area.
- Seeking opportunities for developers to make a positive contribution to the wider historic environment through Section 106 Agreements.

Public resources

The preservation and enhancement of private properties can be improved through the publishing of resources aimed to inform property owners and members of the public. An introductory summary of the Conservation Area Appraisal in the form of a leaflet or factsheet(s) is a simple way to communicate the significance of the area and ensure members of the public are aware of the implications of owning a property within a conservation area. In addition, a maintenance guide would assist property owners in caring for their property in an appropriate manner. A revised Good Practice Design Guide on standard alterations such as signage, shopfronts or advertisements, windows, doors, rainwater goods, boundaries and roof extensions will ensure inappropriate development does not continue to be the accepted norm.

- Provide guidance on appropriate design and materials for windows and doors and encouraging the retention or reinstatement of historic glazing patterns and door designs and the use of appropriate materials.

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- Provide guidance on the traditional form of boundary treatments and encourage their reinstatement where they have been removed or compromised.

- Provide guidance on traditional roofing materials and encouraging the reinstatement of good quality slate and the removal of unsympathetic modern materials such as interlocking concrete tiles.

- Provide and update guidance relating to signage. This should address appropriate size and design, the extent and amount and associated lighting. All further planning applications and advert consent applications should be required to comply, where possible, with this standard, designed to help to restore the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Poor maintenance leads to the deterioration of the fabric of the built environment and results in a loss of architectural details. Improved awareness of simple maintenance and repair would be conducive with the preservation of Ashwell's built heritage. At present there is a range of interpretation (information boards, signage, webpages) within the Conservation Area and relating to the Conservation Area, aimed at improving understanding and awareness. These must continue to be maintained and updated where appropriate to ensure awareness and reinforce the identity of Ashwell as a historic settlement.

Shop Frontages

The main commercial centre of Ashwell is along the High Street, although the number of commercial buildings is outnumbered by residential dwellings, some in converted former shops. In general, where they exist, shopfronts are understated, with traditional shopfront joinery surviving in places. This has significantly helped in the preservation of the Conservation Area's character, particularly that of the High Street. The careful regulation of new shop fronts as part of the planning decision making process would ensure this positive characteristic remains into the future.

There is potential to raise awareness of the importance of historic shopfronts and traditional signage and the contribution they make to the special interest of the Conservation Area through the production of information leaflets or web pages which provide guidance for shop owners on upkeep and maintenance of historic frontages. Article 4 Directions could also be used to prevent loss of historic shop frontages.

Tree Management

In line with the Town and Country Planning Act, all trees in Conservation Areas are afforded the same protection as a Tree Preservation Order. Trees which have a trunk diameter of more than 75mm, at a height of 1.5m from the ground, may not be felled or lopped unless six weeks written notice has been given to the Council. Six weeks notice has to be given to the council under S211 of the Act.

It is also considered that any prominent trees, street trees, and trees with amenity value on private land throughout the Conservation Area should be monitored and maintained appropriately. Any tree that makes a positive contribution to the area should be retained, maintained and, if felled (only if dead, dying or dangerous) replaced with an appropriate new tree.

Twentieth Century Buildings

There are some twentieth century buildings which make a neutral or negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area. There is scope to enhance these sites and buildings through a considered design approach which can guide future improvements. Should opportunities for redevelopment arise in the future, high quality design should be pursued

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and encouraged through design guidance.

5.2 Positive Management: Longer Term

The second set of proposals are also focussed on positive management but either take longer to implement or are better suited to a longer time frame.

Car Parking

This should begin with a car parking survey to establish the need for car parking. Once the level of necessary car parking has been established a landscape strategy should be created by North Herts Council in conjunction with local stakeholders.

Additional hard landscaping for parking could have a particularly harmful impact on the character of the Conservation Area, adding an urban quality at odds with Ashwell's overall character. Where areas of private front gardens have been paved over, this is often in a piecemeal approach and inconsistent with neighbouring properties and adjoining paving. Parameters should be set for all such changes in the Conservation Area as part of an up-to-date design guide, reinforced by an agreed assessment of planning applications by the Local Planning Authority. Planning applications for additional hardstanding which removes sections of hedgerow should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, with great care and consideration given to all new materials such as paving. Consideration of an Article 4 direction which limits permitted development rights in relation to driveways should also be considered if the issue of hardstanding becomes more pressing

Character Appraisal and Management Plan

The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan should be reviewed from time to time to monitor change and inform management proposals.

Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been revised within this appraisal in accordance with the NPPF (2021) and Historic England Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (2019). These alterations to the boundary are described in detail in Section 2.3 of this document. The boundary should continue to be assessed as part of future reviews of the Management Plan to ensure it is robust and adequately protects the significance of the area.

Interpretation: Improved Understanding and Awareness

At present there is no interpretation (information boards, signage, interactive QR Codes) within the Conservation Area aimed at improving understanding and awareness of the village's built heritage. This could be an effective way to improve the awareness and re-establish the identity of Ashwell as a historic settlement.

Opportunity Sites

There are some opportunity sites across the Conservation Area which, if sensitively redeveloped, may enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The Ashwell Neighbourhood Development Plan (2020 Policy ASH1) seeks to focus new development within the defined settlement boundary and to apply a more restrictive approach elsewhere in accordance with national and local policies.

Policy ASH2 of the Neighbourhood Development Plan focuses on design and heritage. This states that in order to maintain the character of the Ashwell Conservation Area, a balance should be struck between the scale, bulk, density and height of the built form of new developments

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with open green spaces and, where relevant, the countryside.

All new development should be designed to a high quality and reinforce and enhance local character, heritage assets and the rural setting of the area. The density of development should create a character that is appropriate to the site's context, including the landscape in which it is set, whilst making best use of the land available. Lower density housing should be located towards the outer edges of the settlement where it abuts open countryside, to maintain views from and into the individual settlements. Development should have regard to both the character of the area in which it is set and to the character of the area overall.

Public Realm

The first opportunity to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area is through investment to improve the wider public realm. This can be achieved through continuing to improve and rationalise existing street furniture.

Better maintenance of areas of public space, through weeding, planting, the renewal or introduction of additional benches and the maintenance of existing features through the creation of an integrated management plan, combined with developer, landowners and the local authority would be of benefit.

5.3 Funding Opportunities

There are three main funding opportunities which would assist in the execution of these plans:

National Heritage Lottery Fund

The National Heritage Lottery Fund is the single largest dedicated funder of heritage in the UK and therefore is the most obvious potential source of funding. Funding is often targeted at schemes which preserve, enhance and better reveal the special interest of the area whilst also improving public awareness and understanding. Grant opportunities and requirements change overtime, for up-to-date information on NHLF schemes North Herts District Council should consult their appointed Heritage Specialist.

Section 106 Agreements

Planning obligations, also known as Section 106 agreements, can be used by the local authority to ensure any future development has a positive impact upon the Conservation Area. These agreements could be used to fund public realm or site-specific improvements.

Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas (Historic England)

Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas is a programme run by Historic England to target funding for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. As the name suggests, the scheme forms partnerships with local authorities (along with any additional funding partners) to facilitate the regeneration of an area through the conservation of its built heritage. The scheme makes funds available to individuals to enable them to carry out repairs or improvement works to their property to enhance the area. This would be suitable to preserve and enhance the architectural detailing throughout the Conservation Area.

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6. Appendices

6.1 Bibliography

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6.2 Legislation, Policy and Guidance

LEGISLATION/POLICY/GUIDANCE	DOCUMENT	SECTION/POLICY
Primary Legislation	Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990	66: General duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of planning functions. 72: General duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions.
National Planning Policy	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. National Planning Policy Framework. London: UK Government, 2021.	Section 16; Annex 2
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National Guidance	Historic England, The Setting of Heritage Assets Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3. Second Edition. Swindon: Historic England, 2017.	
Local Supplementary Planning Document	Ashwell Parish Council	Ashwell Neighbourhood Plan, 2021
Local Supplementary Planning Document	Ashwell Parish Council	Ashwell Conservation Area Character Statement, 2019

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6.3 List of All Designated Heritage Assets within the Conservation Area

List Entry Number	Address	Grade
1102707	Guild House	II
1102708	Rose And Crown Public House	II*
1102709	73, High Street	II
1102710	Dixies Farmhouse and Dixies	II
1102711	The Old Cottage	II
1102712	Village Lock-Up in Garden of Number 20	II
1102713	The Rectory	II
1102714	34, Lucas Lane	II
1102715	Church Of St Mary	I
1102716	The Mill	II
1102717	Ashe Cottage	II
1102718	29, 31 And 33, Mill Street	II
1102719	37 And 39 Mill Street	II
1102720	Spring Cottage	II
1102721	Ducklake	II*
1102722	Barn At Ducklake	II
1102723	Pin Cottage and Numbers 12 And 16	II
1102724	Town House (Ashwell Museum)	II*
1102725	Barn Range at Farrow's Farm, 30 Metres West of No 4 (Farmhouse)	II
1102726	1 And 5 West End	II
1102727	39, West End	II
1102740	Wayside Cottage	II
1102743	5, Gardiners Lane	II
1102744	2 And 4, Gardiners Lane	II
1102745	Chain Cottage	II
1102746	Barn At Rear of Three Tuns Hotel	II
1102747	56, High Street	II
1102748	Ashwell Stores and Number 72 (Including Attached Rear Barn)	II
1102749	Digswell Manor (Including Outbuildings at Rear)	II
1102750	Jessamine House	II*
1174877	Cheney Cottage	II
1174896	Cob Wall	II
1174911	The Three Tuns Hotel Public House	II
1174915	Forresters Cottage	II*
1174928	Plait Hall	II
1174949	Two Brewers	II
1174973	Christy's Corner	II
1174998	Bacon's House and Number 84 (Including Attached Outbuildings)	II
1175046	Beams	II
1175177	14, Lucas Lane	II

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List Entry Number	Address	Grade
1175188	Ashwell War Memorial	II
1175238	Lychgate and Adjoining Churchyard Wall	II
1175304	Ashwell Further Education Centre	II
1175337	Ashwell Bury	II
1175350	Mulberry Tree Cottage	II
1175369	Tombstone In New Cemetery to Mary Morwenno Bolitho, Wife Of Philip Le Grand Gribble	II
1175394	Barn Adjoining Number 4	II
1175404	Westbury Farmhouse	II
1175432	Outbuilding To Rear Of Westbury Farmhouse	II
1175450	The Cottage	II
1175465	The Orchard	II
1295318	Granary Adjoining South Corner Of Ducklake	II
1295325	Swan House	II
1295331	Tower Cottage (Including Attached Rear Outbuildings)	II
1295389	1 Mill Street	II
1295406	4 And 6, Mill Lane	II
1295482	Spring House	II
1347292	53, High Street	II
1347311	57 And 59, High Street	II*
1347312	Bear House	II*

List Entry Number	Address	Grade
1347313	Dovecote At Dixies Farm	II
1347314	The Green	II
1347315	Alder Cottage	II
1347316	2, Mill Lane	II
1347317	Tombstone In New Cemetery to Wolverlry Attwood Fordham	II
1347318	18-24, Swan Street	II
1347320	Chantry House	II
1347319	Granary At Westbury Farm, Immediately East of Farmhouse	II
1347328	Vine Cottage	II
1347329	Smithy Cottage	II
1347330	Woodlands (Including Rear Attached Barns)	II
1347366	K6 Telephone Kiosk Adjoining the Rose and Crown Public House	II
1451703	Crop Marks of Five Ring Ditches West of Station Road, Ashwell	N/A
1000904	Ashwell Bury	II

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6.4 Glossary

Bargeboard - A board fastened to the projecting gables of a roof.

Bay window - Window of one or more storeys projecting from the face of a building.

Capital - The topmost member of a column (or pilaster).

Casement window - Window hung vertically, hinged one side, so that it swings inward or outward.

Coping - The capping or covering of a wall.

Cornice - Upper section of an entablature, a projecting shelf along the top of a wall often supported by brackets or corbels.

Cross-wing - Wing attached to a main or original house block, its axis at right angles to the original block, and often gabled.

Domesday Book – survey conducted in 1086 following the Norman Conquest, detailing towns and parishes within England.

Dormer - A structural element protruding from the plane of a sloping roof surface. Dormers are used to create usable space in the roof by adding headroom and usually also by enabling addition of windows.

Façade - An exterior side of a building, usually the front.

Gable - A triangular portion of an end wall between the edges of a sloping roof.

Henge Monument - A prehistoric circular or oval earthen enclosure, dating from around 3000 BC to 2000 BC.

Hip roof - A type of roof where all sides slope downwards from the ridge to the eaves.

Holloway – lane or road, marked in the ground by raised banks either side

Jettying - A building technique used in medieval timber frame buildings in which an upper floor projects beyond the dimensions of the floor below.

Parapet - A low wall built up above the level of a roof, to hide the roof or to provide protection against falling.

Sash - The horizontal and vertical frame that encloses the glazing of a window. A sash may be fixed or operable and may be of several different types depending on operation.

Sherd – a shard or piece of pottery

Univallate Hillfort - A defended enclosure common in the later Bronze Age and Iron Age of northwest Europe, bounded by a single line of ramparts, often with strengthened defences around the entrance.

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6.5 Links

All hyperlinks included within the text of this document are reproduced in full below.

Historic England's Guidance on conservation area designation:

https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1/

Details on Historic England's At Risk register:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/

North Herts Council's Consrvation Areas:

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/conservation-areas

North Herts Council's Planning Team:

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning

Historic England's guide to tree preservation orders:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/tree

Historic England's guide to Article 4 directions:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/historic-environment/article4directions

Historic England's Guide to conservation areas (webpage):

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/has/conservation-areas

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PLACE SERVICES

Essex County Council

CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: PIRTON CONSERVATION AREA

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - REGULATORY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the representations made in response to the consultation on the draft Pirton Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) and the proposed boundary changes for the Pirton Conservation Area.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That the boundary changes to the Pirton Conservation Area are approved and the new Pirton conservation area is designated.

2.2. That the Pirton CAAMP is approved and adopted.

2.3. That Officers are authorised to undertake the associated administrative tasks to finalise the designation of the Pirton conservation area, outlined in paragraph 8.6 .

2.4. That delegated authority is granted to the Service Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Transport to make any minor non-material corrections (including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations) to the CAAMP as considered necessary for the publication of the CAAMP.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To ensure that our Conservation Areas and historic assets within North Hertfordshire are appropriately assessed and designated to inform decision making for planning applications and in the preparation of neighbourhood plans and our Local Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Council could refrain from undertaking any further work on conservation areas or local heritage assets, but this would not reflect national policy or legislation which requires local authorities to review and monitor conservation areas from time to time and conserve local and designated assets.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Executive Members and Deputies have been briefed on the relevant matters in this report.

5.2. Public consultation took place on the proposed amendments to the Pirton Conservation Area boundary and the draft CAAMP in July 2022. A summary of the responses is attached as Appendix A. Those responses have been considered and taken into account when finalising the proposed boundaries and the CAAMP.

5.3. Details of the responses received to the consultation are available on the Council's website and the Parish Council, neighbourhood planning group and local ward councillors have all been informed of those responses.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Conservation areas are designated by the Council in its role as Local Planning Authority. They exist to manage and protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place. Local planning authorities have a duty to review past designations from time to time to determine if any further parts of the area should be included within conservation areas or no longer merit that designation.

7.2 Policy SP13 : Historic Environment in the Local Plan states that the Council will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and publication of detailed guidance. In paragraph 4.178 of the supporting text of that Policy it states that:

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.

7.3 Many of the District's conservation areas were designated in the 1960's and 1970's. Consultants were commissioned in 2019 to prepare character statements for the 33 conservation areas that were without information to support the designations. The final character statements were endorsed by Cabinet in January 2021 and are available to view of the Council's website. As part of that work, there were a number of recommendations for further areas of work, which included preparing a full conservation area appraisal and management plan for Pirton.

7.4 The Council commissioned external consultants, Place Services, to prepare a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for Pirton and to recommend any boundary amendments to the Conservation Area.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Cabinet approved the draft CAAMP for Pirton and a number of proposed boundary changes for public consultation in June 2022 with public consultation taking place between July and September 2022.

8.2. The consultation documents were placed on the Council's website, interested parties were contacted and a consultation event was held in the village with the consultants available to answer questions. The Parish Council also helped publicise the consultation period to local residents.

8.3. The draft CAAMP recommended a series of amendments to the Pirton Conservation Area boundary and a number of representations were received in response to the proposals from the Parish Council, the County Council (both the Growth and Infrastructure Unit and the Property Team), a developer and a number of local residents. The issues raised included suggestions to add the area around the Water Tower and Danesfield Road to the conservation area and a number of requests to add further explanatory text to the CAAMP. A full schedule of the representations and the consultant's response to those representations is attached as Appendix A.

8.4. Taking the detailed responses to the consultation into account and using their professional judgement, the consultants have recommended that the Pirton Conservation Area boundary should be amended in some circumstances and a revised conservation area has been finalised. Neither Danefield Road or the Pirton Water Tower have been included in the proposed conservation area boundary as neither was found to have the architectural or historic interest to reflect the special interest of the Conservation Area. The CAAMP has also been revised to reflect the proposed boundary. A map of the proposed boundary changes is shown within the CAAMP, attached as Appendix B.

8.5. The CAAMP sets out the background information about the legislative and policy context for designating conservation areas, includes a description of the history of Pirton, explains the revisions to the Conservation Area boundaries and describes the assessment of significance for the Conservation Area. There is also a section in the CAAMP which sets out the potential opportunities for enhancement and proposals for the management of the Conservation Area.

8.6. If Cabinet agree that the Pirton Conservation Area boundary should be amended, we must notify the Secretary of State and Historic England and are required to publicise the designation of the Pirton Conservation Area with a notice placed in the London Gazette and a local newspaper, in accordance with section 70(8) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. The Local Land Charges register will also be updated with the details of the new boundary.

8.7. The Local Plan Policies Map, adopted in November 2022 details how and where the policies in the Local Plan have effect geographically. The maps also show a number of environmental designations, including conservation area boundaries which are designated under different pieces of legislation. The Local Plan Policies Maps will be updated with the

details of the new conservation area boundaries which will be available on the website and through the interactive maps.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under the Terms of Reference for Cabinet, the Constitution states that it may exercise the Council's functions as Local Planning Authority and receive reports on strategic planning matters, (except to the extent that those functions are by law the responsibility of the Council or delegated to the Service Director: Regulatory).

9.2. Section 69 of Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to designate areas which they consider possess architectural or historic interest worthy of preservation or enhancement as Conservation Areas. As part of this, section 71 of the Act requires the local planning authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these areas, such as in the form of an appraisal document. It is also the Local Authority's duty to ensure that special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area when making planning decisions, as per section 72 of the Act. Any decision is taken by the Local Planning Authority, and should be taken having considered the external professional consultant's report Appended at B and consultation responses at Appendix A. The consultants have confirmed that they have reached their professional conclusions in accordance with best practice guidance and the consultation responses detailed in Appendix A.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The costs for the work on the Pirton CAAMP and boundary review has been met from within the planning fees reserve. £120k has been earmarked for conservation work over an anticipated three years. So far £19k has been spent in 2021/22 and £10.4k in 2022/23, so there is £90,553 left to fund conservation work. Each CAAMP cost around £10-12k.

10.2. If Cabinet approve the amended boundary for the Pirton Conservation Area, there will be some revenue costs associated with advertising the proposed changes in the London Gazette and a local newspaper.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Sustainable Development of the District is identified as a Corporate Risk. The preparation of the CAAMP for the Pirton Conservation Area will assist in promoting sustainable development in the future.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are not considered to be any direct equality implication issues arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. The adoption of the CAAMP for the Pirton Conservation Area will assist in the management of the historic environment.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. There are no new human resource implications arising from the contents of this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A – Report on the Public Consultation Process for the Pirton Conservation Area

16.2 Appendix B – Pirton Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan, March 2023

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management, Historic England Advice Note 1, 2019

18.2 Cabinet report : Conservation Area Summary Report and Next Steps, 26 January 2021, Agenda Item 10

18.3 Cabinet report : Conservation Area Reviews, 21 June 2021

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21/03/23

Report on the Public Consultation Process for the Pirton Conservation Area.

Introduction

After the completion of the first draft of the Pirton Conservation Area, a public event was held at Pirton Village Hall on Wednesday 13th July 2022. Prior to the event, Place Services produced illustrated posters and large-scale maps, which were displayed at the Village Hall. These showed the proposed boundary alterations and described the area's special historic and architectural interest.

Copies of the draft document were also available for the attendees to read or take away with them for closer review. The event was well attended and there was much interest from the local community in the Conservation Area and the appraisal process.

Prior to the event, a questionnaire had been prepared which was available to fill out by attendees during the event, or they could take them home for completion and submission later. Alternatively, attendees were encouraged to email the local authority with their comments.

Public Questionnaire Results

In total, two copies of the questionnaire were completed and submitted on the day of the consultation event. A further questionnaire was completed and emailed to the council, meaning there were three responses in total. A summary of the responses is below. The questions asked are in bold type.

1. **How do you relate to the Conservation Area? E.g., long term resident, landowner, business owner, work or live within or near the area.**

Option	Number of respondents
Long term resident	2
Live in Conservation Area	
Live outside Conservation Area	
Other	1

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2. Were you previously aware that there is already a Conservation Area covering Pirton?

Option	Number of respondents
Yes	3
No	
Don't Know	

3. Overall, how do you feel about the Conservation Area designation?

Option	Number of respondents, Comments
Positive	2
Neutral	
Negative	1, You plan to include my land
Don't Know	

4. Do you feel that you understand what a Conservation Area is and what it does? (1 = No not at all, and 5 = yes very well)

Option	Number of respondents
1	
2	
3	2
4	1
5	

5. Is there a building or place that you are specifically interested in and why?
Summary of responses:

Respondent	Response
1	
2	Tithe Barn, Rectory Farm
3	HD276081 / HD552988

6. What makes Pirton's buildings and spaces special to you?
Summary of responses:

Respondent	Response
1	Variety, space!
2	Variety, interest, history architecture
3	N/A

7. Have you noticed any changes in the area, particularly since the year 2019 (the year that the last Character Statement was completed)?
Summary of responses:

Respondent	Response
1	Many (too many) new houses
2	More housing, 150 large houses

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3	No

8. What potential threats (if any) do you think the Conservation Area faces? Typical threats to Conservation Areas include poor maintenance of buildings and spaces, inappropriate new development, unsympathetic alterations to historic buildings, impact of modern shopfronts and advertisement, vacant buildings, and vehicular traffic.

Respondent	Response
1	Inappropriate new development, unsympathetic alterations to historic buildings
2	Threat of building over Wright's Farm
3	N/A

9. Do you feel the four different character areas within the Conservation Area have been correctly identified?
Yes/No/Don't Know
If you have answered no, which character areas should be changed and why?

Option	Number of respondents
Yes	1
No	
Don't Know	1

10. It is proposed to amend the Conservation Area to include elements that are considered to have special architectural or historic interest and remove those that do not. Do you agree with the revisions?
Yes/No/Don't Know

If you have answered no, why do you think these areas either should, or should not be included within the Conservation Area?

Option	Number of respondents
Yes	1
No	
Don't Know	1

11. Do you feel there are any other areas which should be removed from the Conservation Area?
Please state below, using specific street names:

Option	Number of respondents	Additional Comments
Yes	1	HD276081 / HD552988
No	2	

12. Do you feel there are any areas which should be included within the Conservation Area?

Respondent	Response
1	
2	Water Tower

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13. Do you think all the opportunities for enhancement have been identified? Yes/No/Don't Know
If no, please provide details of aspects of the Conservation Area you think would benefit from improvement:

Option	Number of respondents
Yes	1
No	
Don't Know	1

14. The Management Plan provides guidance on how to improve and/or preserve the significance of the Conservation Area. Do you agree with the proposals?
Yes/No/Don't Know

Option	Number of respondents
Yes	
No	
Don't Know	2

If you have answered no, or have further comments, please provide them here:
Comments:

One further comment was received, in relation to the proposed inclusion of fields HD276081 / HD552988. The respondent states that the land is not part of Wrights Farm and has not changed from purely fields in many years, and requests the land not be included within the Conservation Area unless there is good reason to include it.

15. Please provide any further comments you may have:

No further comments were received.

Assessment of Questionnaire results
Overall, the questionnaire respondents presented a positive attitude toward the Conservation Area, with criticism levelled at the proposed expansion of the Conservation Area.

The condition of the Tithe Barn at Rectory Farm was also raised as a cause for concern, as was the expansion of the village through the creation of new homes. These concerns were reiterated in multiple answers, with new development across the village and Wright's Farm also raised as potential threats to the significance of the Conservation Area.

Regarding the boundary, The Water Tower on Prior's Hill was proposed for inclusion within the Pirton Conservation Area by a respondent, and a small field north of Shillington Road requested for removal from the proposed Conservation Area extension.

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In response to the comments provided, the Tithe Barn has been highlighted as a Building at Risk within the Conservation Area Appraisal (page and the section on new development has been expanded to better reinforce how unsympathetic alterations and additional housing could have a negative effect upon Pirton Conservation Area's significance.

The proposal to include The Water Tower was also submitted via email and full comments regarding this are included in the table below. The field referred to by one respondent is north of Shillington Road, to the rear of houses yet not part of Wright's Farm in terms of ownership. As a field, it adds to the rural quality and appearance of this section of the Conservation Area and forms part of the wider setting of Wrights Farm. Omission of this field from the Conservation Area would result in a small parcel of land being excluded from the Conservation Area, bordered by the Conservation Area and sections of land which share a similar land use and visual quality. This would result in a conflicted boundary, and it is not proposed therefore to remove fields HD276081 / HD552988 as requested.

Further consultation results

In addition to the feedback from the questionnaire, detailed comments were received via email from members of the public, representatives of the Parish Council, the Local Authority and Historic England. These are summarised in the table below, along with responses to the comments and the actions taken.

Name/Organisation	Summary of comments	Place Services' Response	Action
Xavier Preston Senior Planning Officer. Growth and Infrastructure Unit. Sustainable Growth Hertfordshire County Council	We would always advise that authorities engage with the HCC Historic Environment team during the preparation of consultation documents of this nature.	N/A	N/A
	Not clear if the Historic Environment Record (HER) was consulted. If not, then this should be done as a requirement of the NPPF	The HER was consulted, although this has not been explicitly mentioned in the form of HER numbers.	A reference to the HHER has been added to section 2.1, page 13.
	At least one of the Scheduled Monuments shown in the document for Pirton are incorrect and therefore Historic England should be contacted to confirm	The master mapping information for the Prior's Hill SM was incorrect, this has been updated.	The map on page 23 has been amended.

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	the correct extent of Scheduled Monuments.		
	Both the documents should be prepared using a comprehensive walk over survey of the settlements to inform their respective recommendations.	Multiple site visits were undertaken to inform the character analysis and assess architectural and historic special interest. A comprehensive archaeological walk-over survey would be beyond the remit of the appraisal of the CA.	No action required.
	Archaeological and heritage terminology requires clarification	A glossary is included at the end of the document.	The glossary has been reviewed.
Ollie Lloyd, on behalf of Gladman Developments Limited	Requested more justification for the proposed expansion of the Conservation Area in Character Area Three and the inclusion of the additional areas, including why sections of Royal Oak Lane have been included. No objection to the expansions in Character Areas One and Two.	The areas posed for addition to the Conservation Area have been assessed in relation to relevant policy and having viewed the village as a whole. From a walkover of the whole village, it became clear that elements of the Conservation Area's previously identified significance and character were present in other section of the village not included within the Conservation Area boundary. For this reason, buildings on Holwell Road are proposed to be added to the CA. Further explanation of the additions will be added re. changes to the	The boundary has been re-assessed, with Character Area Three reduced in size. Sections of Royal Oak Lane proposed for addition to the Conservation Area have been removed from the revised boundary. The views sections for all three character areas has been amended, with views now numbered (to match the Ashwell document) and photographs of some of the views included, as well as additional description.

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		boundary which addresses the architectural/historic interest of the sections provided. The description of character area three also to be updated. Images of views to be added.	
	Requests that further reference to planning policy is included, particularly sections 192, 193 and 206 of the NPPF, Historic England guidance notes and sections of the NPPG. Suggests that the evidence base for the proposed expansion of the CA is not adequately demonstrated.	The references to policy are included at the end of the document in the Appendix.	No action required re. guidance/policy. The section on changes to the boundary (pages 19-21) have been expanded.
	Would like more justification of views and the boundary, particularly in Character Area Three which Gladman feel is not typical and undermines the special interest of the Conservation Area. Raises questions as to why houses on the High Street and Holwell Road are within the boundary, particularly as they often feature atypical elements (eg. uPVC windows) as well as the land north of Holwell Road. The inclusion of the green triangle/verge at the	The houses on the High Street are often neutral in appearance, however the route itself is historic and the topography and characteristics of the street are indicative of the wider Conservation Area. This includes the green verges, triangles at junctions and the building materials used in these areas.	The special interest of the houses on Holwell Road is explained within the document, particularly in regard to how they display characteristics present throughout the Conservation Area. The text relating to Character Area Three has been expanded to provide clearer reference to the features these areas display.

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	junction of Drover's Way and Holwell Road is also questioned, as well as the verges on Royal Oak Lane.		Views in all Character Area's have been reassessed, with photographs and further explanations added.
Helen Hofton on behalf of the Pirton History Group	Following review of the document, Pirton History Group wish to highlight the history of the village's water town on Priors Hill, and the history of the structure. A brief history of the water tower has been provided by the history group, stating when the water tower was built (1936) and the role it had in supplying water to houses within Pirton in the mid twentieth century. A description is also provided of the tower's role in World War Two, when it doubled as a lookout tower. The history group suggest that the water tower should be added to the Conservation Area, particularly as the neighbouring building, Hill Farm, is proposed for inclusion as part of the reviewed boundary.	The water tower, although a feature of the village's twentieth century history, does not have the architectural or historic significance which warrants its inclusion within the Conservation Area. PS do however acknowledge the contribution it makes to the setting of the Conservation Area, as well as its impact upon views out of and within the Conservation Area.	A description of the water tower has been added to page 53. The CAAMP now acknowledges the water tower's contribution to key views within Character Area One and its prominence on Prior's Hill.

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Mr England (resident)	Concerned about the inclusion of the section of land north of Holwell Lane added to the boundary, notes that these are agricultural areas of land, not gardens/part of the houses on Holwell Road. General comments re. typos.	PS will reassess boundary change to north east.	Section on Holwell Lane condensed to only include the two brick detached houses, not the northern section of land which abuts Holwell Road. Typos corrected.
	Concerns re climate change and the addition of cladding/external insulation, as well as EV charging points.	PS will consider how a section on sustainability can be included within the management proposals.	Additional section on sustainability added to the management plan.
	Concerns re. parking, stressing that parking in front of dwellings is necessary, particularly on Holwell Road.	PS will look at the phrasing of section on parking as to ensure it is fair/ understands the desire of people to park directly outside their homes.	The section on parking has been reviewed and retained; the document stresses that the removal of gardens for parking is harmful to the CA but does not comment on on-street parking.
Anna Mayers, on behalf of the Property Planning Team at Hertfordshire County Council (landowner)	Provides comments in relation to Wrights Farm, which is proposed for addition to the Conservation Area. Understanding of the reasons behind adding Wrights Barn to the CA but concerned that the CAAMP does not adequately describe the remainder of the site. Wishes to highlight	Additional information will be added to the section describing the boundary changes which clarifies/describes the architectural value (or lack thereof) of the other buildings. Text also to be added to the management plan which identifies Wrights Farm as an area requiring	See page 65, which has added a small paragraph about Wrights Farm.

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	how buildings within the setting of the listed barn are unsympathetic in appearance and low in architectural quality and historic value. Of the opinion that loss of these elements would be beneficial to the setting of the listed barn.	enhancement.	
Mr Aspinall (land owner/resident)	Concerned re. the reasoning behind the document, questions the public engagement and cost. General comments about the state of planning/designations etc; misunderstanding of the planning process re. listing. Feels that the report is obstructive to building and that it does not make adequate reference to the local plan.	Many of the questions in the response are for NHDC, and perhaps not even relevant – re. cost of living etc. Section on policy to be updated to reflect the adoption of the new local plan by the council and provide clarification of the listing process.	Section 1.4 has been updated to reference the new local plan and provide additional commentary on the neighbourhood plan.
	Very concerned about the local plan and feels this document does not reflect the 21st century environment. Feels that the local authority should not comment on housing/design within Conservation Areas without that strategy also being included within the local plan.	Section on cost of living/environmental pressure to be added to the management proposals.	A new section on sustainability and green infrastructure has been added on pages 65-67.

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Pirton Parish Council	Welcomes the creation of a CAAMP for Pirton and the addition of areas to the Conservation Area boundary. Requests maps be at a better scale or the colours altered. Feel the removal of sections of land on Walnut Tree Road are uncontroversial, due to the new houses which have been constructed in this area.	General update to policy section. Maps to be altered and enhanced where possible.	Policies section and appendixes updated to reference the neighbourhood plan. Maps have been enlarged and will be provided separately to NHDC for addition to their website/GIS files.
	Suggests Danefield Road and the Water Tower are assessed for inclusion. Requests the section on Wrights Farm is enhanced, as more now known about the archaeology in this area, since the barn was listed. Highlights typos and errors in the text.	Aspects to be reconsidered re. the boundary and typos etc amended.	The water tower has not been included within the Conservation Area boundary, nor has Danefield Road, the architectural and historic interest of which is not found to reflect the special interest of the Conservation Area. The water tower is considered part of the setting of the Conservation Area, however, and this has been acknowledged on page 18 and 53.

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	Welcomes the use of character areas, which they feel are clearly defined. Concerned re. West Barn on Rectory Farm being at risk. Errors highlighted within the archaeology section; Largely supportive of the document and the management plans.	PS are pleased with the largely positive feedback from the parish council, all typos and inaccuracies highlighted by the PC will be corrected for the final draft.	History section updated to reflect comments re. the archaeology, correcting mistakes and making aspects clearer as suggested.
	Concerned that the role of the neighbourhood plan is underplayed, stresses the work the PC currently undertakes within the village.	The neighbourhood plan is recognised where appropriate, this document is not intended to be criticism of the PC's work and we appreciate that many of the suggestions are out of the PC's control; it is hoped that the management plan will bolster the work already undertaken by the Parish Council.	No action to take.
	Comments on the opportunities for enhancement: largely supportive of the proposals, but not inclined to add signage etc which differentiates the CA from the rest of the village.	The suggestions in the management plan will not work for every Conservation Area; these are discretionary recommendations to be implemented as appropriate.	No action required.
Alan and Susan Hack	Concern re. the signage and general public realm within the CA. Provides commentary on the parking within	Section on public realm to be updated, re-read/reassess the section on signage to be more prescriptive and	The management plan has been enhanced in regards to parking, with the

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	Pirton, on Chipping/Little Green. Feel that additional signage is required to deter people from parking in these areas.	easier to understand.	opportunities for enhancement stressing how parking on Chipping Green is harmful to the significance of the Pirton Conservation Area.

Hopefully the above table and description provides full commentary on the changes which have been made to the document post-public consultation.

Should you have any further questions or require further amendments to the document, please contact me.

Best wishes,

Laura Johnson
Senior Built Heritage Consultant
Place Services.

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Pirton Conservation Area
Character Appraisal and Management Plan

Client:
North Herts Council

Date:
March 2023



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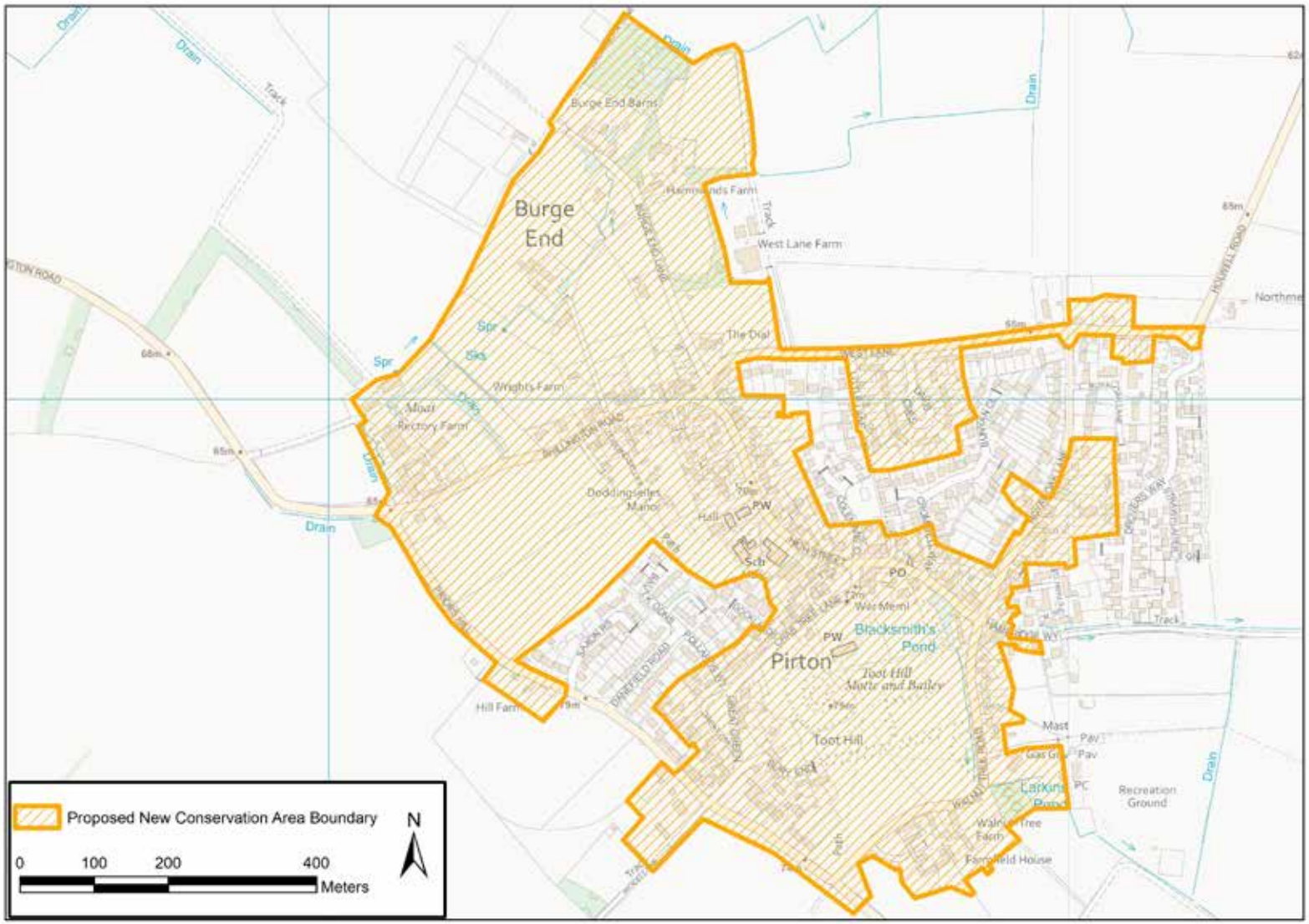

Figure 1: Map of the Pirton Conservation Area

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1. Introduction

1.1 Summary

Pirton Conservation Area encompasses the core of the Pirton village, a historic rural settlement with an extensive history. Located in North Hertfordshire, three miles northwest of Hitchin, Pirton is on the northern edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is surrounded by an agricultural landscape. The village has a compact, triangular layout, orientated around St Mary's Parish Church and the remains of Pirton's long demolished motte and bailey castle and original medieval settlement. Although long since lost, the site of the castle and original village remain an important area of green space designated as a scheduled monument at the heart of the Conservation Area.

The village retains many important archaeological, architectural, and historic features which contribute to its character, leading to most of Pirton being included within the Conservation Area boundary. This includes three scheduled monuments, numerous listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets, both built and archaeological. Surviving buildings of merit and archaeological features vary widely in age, yet all contribute positively to the Conservation Area's significance as an area of special interest, providing a link to the history and heritage of Pirton and wider area.

1.2 Purpose of the Appraisal

This document is to be used as a baseline to inform future change, development and design with regard to the sensitivities of the historic environment and its unique character.

The appraisal recognises designated and non-designated heritage assets within the area which contribute to its special interest, along with their setting. It will consider how different Character Areas within Pirton Conservation Area came to be developed, their building styles, forms, materials, scale, density, roads, footpaths, alleys, streetscapes, open spaces, views, landscape, landmarks, and topography. These qualities will be used to assess the key characteristics of each area, highlighting potential impact future developments may have upon the significance of heritage assets and the character of Pirton. This assessment is based on information derived from documentary research and analysis of the individual character areas.

This appraisal will enhance understanding of Pirton Conservation Area and its development, informing future design. Applications that demonstrate an understanding of the character of a Conservation Area are more likely to produce appropriate design and positive outcomes for agents and their clients.

It is expected that applications for planning permission will also consult and follow the best practice guidance outlined in the bibliography.

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1.3 Frequently Asked Questions

A selection of frequently asked questions are outlined below. If you require further advice, please contact North Herts Council's planning department. Hyperlinks to further information are included within the text; a list of all links is included as Appendix 6.5.

What is a conservation area?

Conservation areas are designated by the Local Planning Authority as areas of special architectural and historic interest. There are many different types of conservation area, which vary in size and character, and range from historic town centres to country houses set in historic parks. Conservation area designation introduces additional planning controls and considerations, which exist to protect an area's special character and appearance and the features that make it unique and distinctive. Although designation introduces controls over the way that owners can develop their properties, it is generally considered that these controls are beneficial as they sustain and/or enhance the value of properties within conservation areas.

The National Planning Policy Framework regards conservations areas as 'designated heritage assets'.

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act specifies the general duty of Local Authorities, in the exercise of planning functions (Section 72). The 1990 Act states that special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area.

How are conservation areas designated and managed?

The designation process includes detailed analysis of the proposed conservation area and adoption by the local planning authority. A review process should be periodically undertaken, and the Conservation Area assessed to safeguard that it retains special architectural or historic interest. Threats can be identified, and the boundary reviewed, to ensure it is still relevant and appropriate.

This Conservation Area is supported by an appraisal and management plan. The appraisal describes the importance of an area in terms of its character, architecture, history, development form and landscaping. The management plan, included within the appraisal, sets out various positive proposals to improve, enhance and protect the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

How can I find out if I live in a conservation area?

Boundary maps of all conservation areas in the district can be found on North Herts Council's website. The council also has an online interactive map search function, which allows you to search for a specific property. Full details, including contact details for the local authority, can be accessed via https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/conservation-areas.

What are the Council's duties regarding development in conservation areas?

The Local Authority must follow the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG). These set out in clear terms how development proposals within Conservation Areas should be considered on the basis of whether they preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area. Applications which fail to preserve or enhance the character of the

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Conservation Area are likely to be refused as a result. An authorities Local Plan also typically includes a specific policy on Conservation Areas.

Do I need permission to change a property in a conservation area?

Permitted development rights are not the same within a conservation area as they are elsewhere. This means things that normally would not require planning permission will require consent within a conservation area's boundary. For example, side extensions, two storey rear extensions, roof extensions and the cladding of buildings, which normally would class as permitted development, require planning permission if the building affected is in a conservation area.

North Herts Council's planning team can provide further information on whether alterations require planning permission. Full details of permitted development rights are set out in The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2020.

Further consideration may also need to be given to the setting of listed buildings, which many conservation areas are likely to contain.

Do I need to make an application for routine maintenance work?

If routine maintenance works are to be carried out using authentic materials and traditional craft techniques, on a like-for-like basis, it is unlikely that you will need to apply for permission from the local authority. However, it is strongly recommended that you contact the local planning authority for clarification before commencing any works. The use of a contractor with the necessary skills and experience of working on historic buildings is essential. Inappropriate maintenance works and the use of the wrong materials will cause damage to the fabric of a historic building.

What is an Article 4 Direction?

Some conservation areas are covered by an Article 4 Direction, which brings certain types of development back under the control of a local planning authority. This is in addition to the exemptions outlined in the Permitted Development Order Act and, where in place, an Article 4 direction allows potentially harmful proposals to be considered on a case by case basis through planning applications. Article 4 Directions are used to control works that could threaten the character of an area and a planning application may be required for development that would otherwise have been permitted development. Historic England provides information on Article 4 Directions on their website. See: https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/historic-environment/article4direction.

Can I demolish a building in a conservation area?

Demolition, or substantial removal of part of a building within a conservation area, will usually require permission from the local planning authority. It is important to speak to them before beginning any demolition works, to clarify if permission is required. This includes the demolition of boundary walls.

Will I need to apply for permission for a new or replacement garage, fence, boundary wall or garden structure?

Any demolition, development or construction in conservation areas will generally need planning permission. A replacement boundary, garage, cartlodge or greenhouse will need to be designed with the special historic and architectural interest of the Conservation Area in mind. North Herts Council will provide advice as to how to proceed with an application.

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Can I remove a tree within a conservation area?

If you are thinking of cutting down a tree or doing any pruning work, the local planning authority must be notified 6 weeks before any work begins. This enables the authority to assess the contribution the tree makes to the character of the conservation area and, if necessary, create a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) to protect it. Consent will be required for any works to trees that are protected. Further information on TPOs can be found on Historic England's website (https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/tree/).

How can I find out more?

Historic England's website has information on conservation areas and their designation. Further information on the importance of conservation areas, and what it means to live in one, can also be accessed via their website: (https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/has/conservationareas/).

Historic England has also published an advice note called Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management which sets out advice on the appraisal of conservation areas and managing change in conservation areas. It is available to download here: https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designationmanagement-advice-note-1/.

In addition, local planning authorities have information on the conservation areas within their boundaries available on their websites. They will have information pertaining to when the conservation area was designated, how far it extends and the reason for its designation.

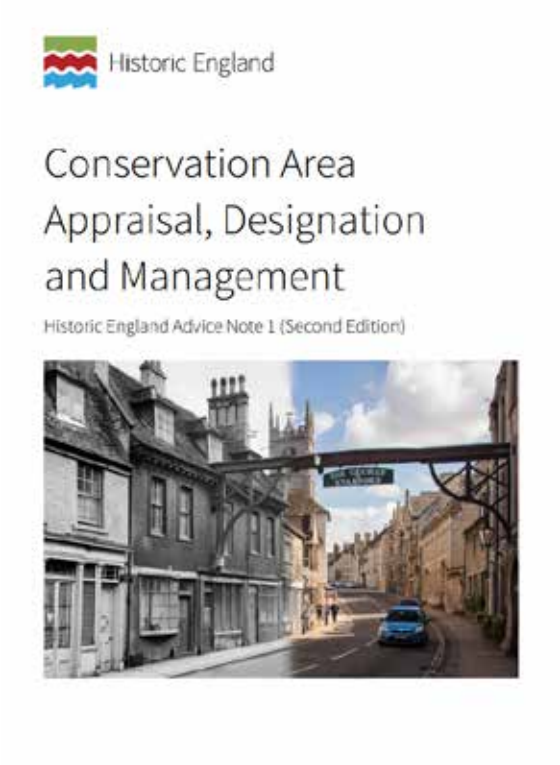

Figure 2: Cover Page, *Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management*, Historic England

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1.4 Planning Policy Context

National Planning Policies

The national legislative framework for the creation, conservation and enhancement of conservation areas and listed buildings is set out Part II of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (HMSO 1990).

Section 69 of this act requires Local Planning Authorities to designate areas which they consider possess architectural or historic interest worthy of preservation or enhancement as Conservation Areas. As part of this, section 71 of the Act requires the Local Planning Authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these areas, such as in the form of an appraisal document. It is also the Local Authority's duty to ensure that special attention is paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the conservation when making planning decisions, as per section 72 of the Act.

National planning policy in relation to the conservation and enhancement of heritage assets is outlined in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF (DCLG 2021). Chapter 16 of the NPPF relates specifically to the historic environment, with Annex 2: Glossary providing a definition of heritage terms, some of which are reproduced in Appendix 6.4 of this document.

Within the NPPF, the importance of heritage assets is outlined, with emphasis placed upon the contribution they make to the quality of life of existing and future generations. Local Planning Authorities should seek to preserve or enhance the historic environment, developing strategies which consider the wider benefits that the conservation of heritage assets can bring, and draw upon the contribution made by the historic environment to local character and distinctiveness.

A further national planning policy which applies is The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2020.

Careful consideration must be given to the Permitted Development Order by the Local Planning Authority, Residents and other Interested Parties, as many permitted development rights are removed in Conservation Areas.

Local planning polices

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011 – 2031

The local plan was adopted on 8th November 2022. A summary of the relevant polices is given below:

SP13: Historic Environment. This sets out the Council's heritage strategy and its positive intentions to conserve and enhance its heritage assets and their setting whilst enabling appropriate development in accordance with paragraph 126 of the NPPF. The policy is based on a wide range of evidence that make up the District's heritage.

Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets. This policy recognises the significance of North Hertfordshire's designated heritage assets and their settings.

Policy HE2: Heritage at risk. This policy is concerned with the Council's efforts to manage 'at risk' heritage. This covers the national Historic England heritage at risk register, which includes scheduled monuments and heritage assets designated at grade I or II* and conservation areas. The Council also produces an 'At Risk' register that covers all listed building grades.

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Policy HE3: Non-designated heritage assets. This reflects the Council's approach to local heritage assets. Assets are identified as part of a rolling programme of research to inform local lists of heritage assets and through the planning and plan making process.

Policy HE4: Archaeology. This relates to archaeological remains and reflects the methods to investigate, and the potential for chance discoveries. Areas of as yet, unknown archaeology may be identified during research, or through the planning or plan making process. The sites or areas should be treated in the same as archaeology areas and areas of archaeological significance.

Pirton Neighbourhood Development Plan 2011-2031

The Pirton Neighbourhood Plan was submitted by the Parish Council to North Hertfordshire District Council in October 2016. In March 2018 a referendum voted in favour of the neighbourhood plan, and from April 2018 is has formed part of the statutory development plan for North Herts Council. The neighbourhood plan sets out a vision for Pirton and outlines planning policies which will be used to determine planning applications within the parish.

The neighbourhood plan stresses that to achieve sustainable development, a thoughtful and sensitive approach is needed. It is felt that any new development should reflect the character of the parish and that the design of development should look and feel like local properties. The Neighbourhood Plan requires high-quality design standards that integrate with the area and reflect and reinforce, without overwhelming, the character of the parish.

Further information on neighbourhood planning policies and guidance can be accessed via this link: http://www.pirtonneighbourhoodplan.org.uk/.

Relevant policies within the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan which relate to the Pirton Conservation Area are:

PNP 2 and PNP 3: Design and Character

PNP 8: Heritage Assets and Archaeological Heritage.

PNP 2 and 3 of the Neighbourhood Plan relate to the character and design of any new development, with policy NPN 3 specifically relating to residential extension (excluding those allowed by permitted development).

These policies highlight that the design, density, quality and sustainability of new developments are key considerations for the Parish Councils. Only developments which meet the Neighbourhood Plan's requirements

Section 8.1 of policy PNP 8 states that proposals which conserve or enhance the heritage assets of the parish, as well as the settings of these assets, will be supported.

Under section 8.2 of Policy PNP 8, archaeological surveys should be undertaken on sites which include or have the potential archaeological remains, either desk based or field work, dependent on the site.

Section 8.3 indicates that proposals which demonstrate an appropriate consultation of the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record, as well as consultation with the Pirton Parish Council, will be supported.

A further document which forms part of the neighbourhood plan and should be considered as part of any proposed development within the village is the Pirton Village Character Assesment.

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2. Context and Character

Pirton village is in North Hertfordshire, within its own Parish Boundary [Figure 3. The village has developed in a triangular formation, southeast of the junction between two routes, Shillington Road/West Lane which runs east/west and Priors Hill/Hitchin Road which runs north/south. Walnut Tree Road/Royal Oak Lane completes the triangle, framing the village core. The Conservation Area includes a large percentage of the village boundary, excluding select areas of modern housing on the outer edges of the settlement.

Located close to Hertfordshire's northern border with Bedfordshire, Pirton is well connected to surrounding towns and villages and has been throughout its history. The Icknield Way, an ancient route across East Anglia, forms part of Walnut Tree Lane, at the southern edge of the Conservation Area. The path remains and is well signposted. Other footpaths and bridleways throughout the village allow quick and easy pedestrian access throughout the village and connect Pirton to Shillington in the north west and Oughton Head, on the edge of Hitchin, to the south east. Nestled in a small dip, the route into Pirton from surrounding settlements is heavily wooded. Tree cover around the village's edges and the low height of buildings largely conceal built form within Pirton in long views looking toward the village from the surrounding countryside.

At the Conservation Area's western edge is the Chilterns AONB, the rolling hills of which form an important part of Pirton's wider landscape. From the western side of the Conservation Area in particular, expansive fields allow for wide views from within the Conservation Area across the landscape punctuated by the hill scape to the west. Long views into an agricultural landscape can also be gained when looking out of the conservation area toward Holwell in the northeast.

Oughton Head Common Nature Reserve, Pegsdon Hills and Hoo Bit Nature Reserve, and Knocking Hoe National Nature Reserve, are located just outside Pirton Parish's boundary. As areas of ecological value, they contribute positively to Pirton's wider setting, emphasising the value of the village's surrounding landscape.

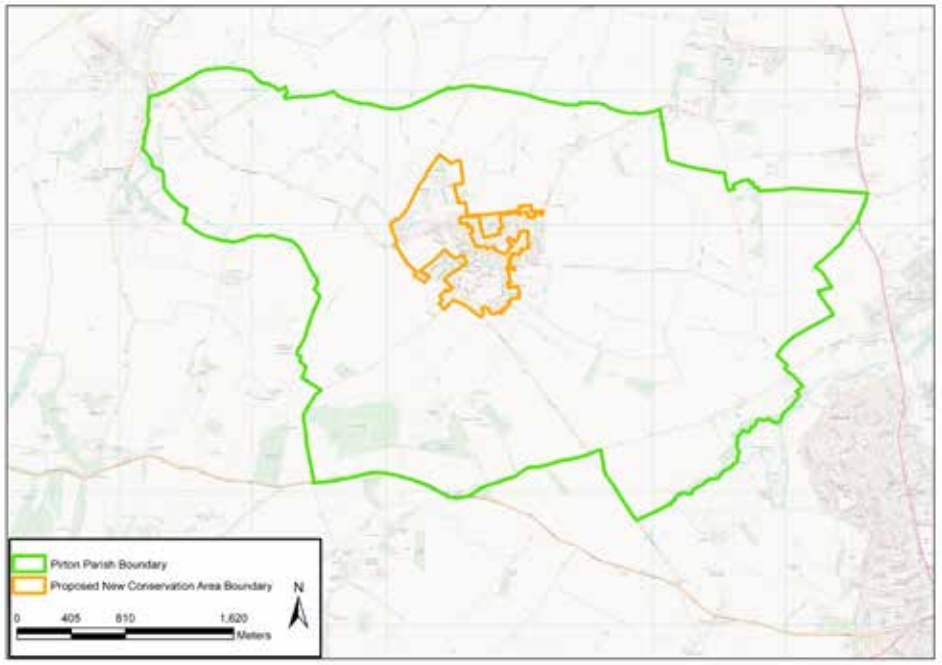

Figure 3: Map showing Pirton Conservation Area in relation to the Pirton Parish boundary

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2.1 Origin and Evolution

The following section provides an overview of the history of Pirton Conservation Area and the surrounding settlement.

Modern-day Pirton has its roots in the Saxon period, although archaeological evidence has been found which indicates occupation of the area has occurred since prehistory. It is a village with an interesting and extensive history that has been well researched and documented, with the village featuring as one of the settlements studied as part of the ongoing Currently Occupied Rural Settlement (CORS) research project.

For further information and an extensive history of the village, please refer to the texts listed in Appendix 6.1: Bibliography.

This section has been produced following consultation of the Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record and documentary evidence.

Prehistory (-10,000 BCE – 43 AD)

Archaeological evidence indicates that there has been human activity in and around Pirton since at least the Neolithic period, the final period of the Stone Age, roughly 4,000–200BCE. Ring ditches from this Neolithic period have been excavated within the Conservation Area, with these finds designated as part of the Land to the east of Priors Hill and north of Danefield Road scheduled monument. The main significance of this monument is, however, in its features from the Anglo-Saxon period, with evidence found of human activity between the 5th and 9th century. No human remains were discovered.



Figure 4: A Bronze Age flint arrowhead, found in Pirton and now in the collection of Letchworth Museum © North Hertfordshire Museum

At present the scheduled monument remains largely unexcavated and it is suspected that there is high potential for other archaeological material to survive.

Outside the Pirton Conservation Area, further evidence has been found which indicates human activity in the local area in the Stone Age. These include a scatter of Neolithic flints discovered in the mid-1990s, including flint blades, flakes, cores and a scraper, just south of the Conservation Area in Dane Field. Further finds in Lower Stondon, north east of Pirton village, as well as the barrows at Tingley Wood and Knocking Knoll, south west of Pirton, highlight the area was known, if not necessarily extensively populated, by prehistoric humans.

Roman (43 – 410 AD)

There was a strong Roman presence across East Anglia and in Hertfordshire, with many areas of the county featuring Roman remains. Verulamium, modern day St Albans, was an important centre and one of the largest Roman cities; it is located approximately twenty miles south west of Pirton.

Archaeological remains indicate a small settlement was present in Pirton during the Roman period. In terms of the Conservation Area, Roman activity is thought to have been

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concentrated to the centre and north of the current day settlement; although evidence of further Roman activity has been found outside the Conservation Area in an area of agricultural fields west of the modern village named Dane Field. It is thought this field was occupied from the first century onwards and it was here that the settlement gradually grew, continuing into the fifth century. Evidence has been found which indicates industrial activity including iron working and kilns within Pirton, along with high quality imported pottery and coins.

Excavations in 1955 revealed the floor of a Roman building within the vicinity of Toot Hill, in the centre of the village, with further excavations at Pollards Way and Pirton Primary School also finding Roman artefacts. Between 2007 and 2018, as part of the CORS project, an extensive test pit survey across the Pirton recovered pieces of pottery which indicate almost continuous occupation of Pirton from the Roman period to the present.

Anglo Saxon and Early Medieval (410 – 1066 AD)

The history of Pirton in the Saxon and Medieval Period is complex, with the location of the village centre changing throughout this time. In 2015, substantial evidence was found to suggest that, as well as the presence of Neolithic remains, the area of Pirton around Danefield and Priors



Figure 5: Roman Statuette of Mercury in the collection of North Hertfordshire Museum, believed to be found in Pirton in the 1950s © North Hertfordshire Museum 2022

Hill contains many Anglo-Saxon archaeological remains.

During a geophysical survey and trial trenching of the field known as Land East of Priors Hill and North of Danefield Road evidence was found which indicates that early Anglo Saxons lived in Pirton in an enclosed settlement, part of a planned urban layout northwest of the village's present-day centre. Survival of such remains is rare and led to the field's designation as a scheduled monument. In particular, the geophysical survey identified linear features which are thought to represent early medieval furrows, long narrow trenches formed by ploughing.

Physical archaeological investigation of the scheduled monument has found a concentration of post holes in the eastern section of the field, which are thought to represent the remains of early houses or other built structures. The grave of an older male was discovered in the north-eastern section of the field; radio carbon dating of this man's bone indicate he was alive between 775 and 970AD.

No evidence was found within the monument from the later Saxon or Saxo-Norman period, suggesting this is when the village centre shifted east, towards the area now occupied by The Fox pub and more reminiscient of the present-day location of the village centre, surrounding the parish church. Remains of a mid to late Anglo Saxon church and burial ground have been excavated in the Fox site. This is supported by evidence which has found pieces of pottery and other remains dating from the ninth century onwards along the High Street, Walnut Tree Road, Little Lane, Elm Tree

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Close and Shillington Road.



Figure 6: Watercolour of William Ransom excavating Knocking Knoll Tumulus by Samuel Lucas, snr, 1856. ©North Hertfordshire Museum

In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, numerous archaeological investigations were undertaken in Pirton and the wider area. Led by William Ransom, local businessman, these excavations took place at Knocking Knoll, revealed to be a Saxon tumulus south west of the Conservation Area.

Quarrying in the late 1800s identified a Saxon cemetery at Dane Field, a large agricultural field west of the present-day village. Cremations in urns, pots, pins, and graves were discovered and tentatively dated to the sixth or seventh century BCE. The presence of swords, spears and shields buried with human remains led to the field gaining the name Dane Field, with the remains believed to be that of Danish warriors. In the 1990s, further investigation into the archaeological value of Dane Field took place as part of a wider scheme for the installation of an oil pipeline across Dane Field. The early stages of the 1990 investigation did not uncover evidence of Saxon occupation in the northern section of the field, but it did reveal Anglo Saxon pot sherds in the southern section of the site.

Excavations which took place close to The Fox Public House in 1995 on the village's High Street gave more indication of the village's mid to late Anglo Saxon history. Remains of a later Saxon cemetery, suspected remains of an early church and further indications of a planned settlement were found as part of the 1995 excavations. An enclosure ditch surrounded the Anglo-Saxon cemetery, with the cemetery itself found to contain the burials of forty individuals. This further suggests that the early medieval village was located in the eastern side of the Conservation Area, north of St Mary's Church.

Medieval (1066 – 1540 AD)

Pirton appears in the Domesday Book of 1086 as '*Peritone'* and is recorded as home to 54 villagers, a priest, a knight, a freeman and 12 cottars. This description suggests the total population of the village would have been around 425 people, tiny by modern standards but large for the period. Hitchin, the nearest town and one of the largest in Hertfordshire at the time, had approximately 600 occupants.

Before the Norman Conquest of 1066, Pirton was a thriving manorial estate held by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This appears to have continued following the conquest, evidenced by the surviving remains of a twelfth century motte and bailey castle at the heart of the village. Toot Hill, as the castle motte is known, is a scheduled monument and consists of surviving castle earthworks, surviving earthworks of two baileys and remains of a shrunken medieval village, known as The Bury (see "6.4 Glossary" for definitions). The location of the village was carefully planned in relation to the castle, located just south of the castle bailey. Surviving earthworks mark out the position of holloways, tracks and building platforms.

The presence of two castle baileys is unusual, with the larger outer ring also including the parish church. Beyond the baileys to the west is Great Green which survives as an area of open space today. Chipping Green, the area opposite the house Three Gables and owned by Pirton Parish Council, was likely the location of a market; the word chipping derives from '*cēping',* an Old English word meaning market place.

St Mary's Church also dates from the twelfth century, perhaps built to replace an earlier church. Originally a cruciform church with crossing tower, sections of the building have been extensively remodelled and restored, however there are surviving twelfth century

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arches within the building.

Evidence has been found in the form of pottery and other features which suggest Toot Hill and The Bury were densely populated until the fourteenth century, at which point the village fell into a period of decline. This is typical of mediaeval settlements across the country, the populations of which were hit by famine and the Black Death in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Post-Medieval (1540 – 1901 AD)

Following the substantial reduction in the size of Pirton in the fifteenth century, in the post medieval period the village became dispersed with three centres, located away from Toot Hill and The Bury, with sporadic buildings retained within the castle's grounds. These three centres were at Rectory Farm on Shillington Road, around Great Green and at Burge End, with other houses and farms scattered throughout the wider area. The spine roads of Shillington Road and Priors Hill/Hitchin Road remained prominent, highlighting the village's pre-existing function as a transitory place, connecting larger settlements. This period of decline also helped to define Pirton's surviving character, with the arrangement of roads and open spaces giving the village and Conservation Area an interconnected and sporadic pattern of development.

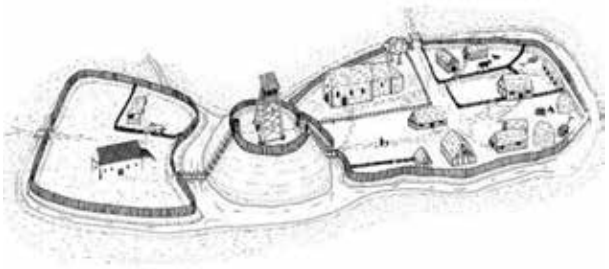

Figure 7: Illustration demonstrating what Pirton's two baileys may have looked like ©North Hertfordshire Museum

Surviving buildings within these three post-medieval areas date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including a cluster of listed buildings on Great Green and a number of listed structures and scheduled monument at Rectory Farm. Within the post-medieval period, agriculture remained integral to the local economy and a source of wealth for Pirton's inhabitants. The tithe barn and moat at Rectory Farm both predate the seventeenth century farmhouse, with the moat used as a defensive system to protect the farmstead. Rectory Farm was a substantial Manor during this period, and the moat would have also functioned as a status symbol whilst perhaps having other functions too, such as providing drainage, sewage or fishing facilities.

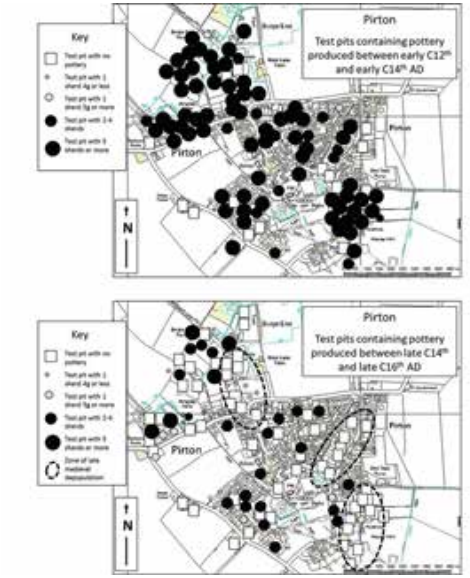

Figure 8: Diagram showing the distribution of pottery pieces found in Pirton, from 'Disaster recovery: New archaeological evidence for the long-term impact of the 'calamitous' fourteenth century' © Carenza Lewis, 2016

Hammonds Farm, at Burge End, is a sixteenth-century former hall house, featuring panelling removed from Rectory Farmhouse in the 1930s. Externally and internally, there are areas of exposed timber framing, infilled with brick nogging in places externally. The building is Grade II* listed due to age and construction method.

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Three Gables, believed to be Pirton's oldest house, is thought to have been constructed in the late fifteenth century. Located on Chipping Green, the house has been subject to many alterations in subsequent centuries, meaning its street frontage deceptively hides the building's medieval core.

Development of the village was slow between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, with little change occurring until the industrial age. The construction of the school at Great Green and two Methodist chapels on the High Street were important phases of Pirton's development and expansion in the nineteenth century, built in response to increased social welfare and the rise of non-Conformist worship within the Victorian Period. The National School, built in 1841, was demolished in 1969, replaced by the house 'Rafters'. The first chapel, built next to the Hammond's Almshouses on the High Street, was demolished in 1960, replaced by a bungalow named Wesley.

Agriculture remained the main source of income for Pirton's inhabitants until the twentieth century. The seasonality of the work, as well as high rates of tax, gave rise to periods of food and monetary shortages for families in the village. Many women found a source of income plaiting straw for nearby Luton's millinery industry, supplementing their family's income. Boys in the village could expect to start work from the age of ten, working full time hours as per the men of the village, until the law changed in 1880, requiring all children to stay in school until the age of thirteen.

The 1818 Enclosure Award had a notable impact upon the surrounding landscape of the village, removing sections of common land and altering how villagers supported themselves. To compensate for this loss of land, sections of the village were allocated as allotments, as shown on the Ordnance Survey map from 1902 [Figure 10]. The enclosing of fields, largely by hedging, changed the village landscape from its medieval appearance to a fractured landscape in the nineteenth century. This change did not, however, last. Modern farming practices, including the use of large items of machinery,



Figure 9: Pirton, extract taken from Bryant's *Map of Hartfordshire,* 1820



Figure 10: Pirton, extract from the 1902 Ordnance Survey Map



Figure 11: Pirton Village Hall

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has resulted in fields opening up again, and the removal of nineteenth century hedgerows. Fields were, nonetheless, no longer farmed in individual strips or lots, as per the medieval period, with industrial farming methods meaning the land was increasingly farmed by only a handful of farmers who controlled much larger swathes of land compared to their medieval counterparts.

Modern (1901 – present)

In the twentieth century, areas of green open space within the village began to be infilled. The most perceptible expansion occurred in 1920, when Davis Crescent [Figure 13] was constructed. Built as council houses post World War One, the block plan and appearance of the dwellings are built in reference to Garden City ideals, reflective of development occurring across Hertfordshire, notably in Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn. Set around a communal green, with large front and back gardens, the houses have a homogeneous, uniform appearance with an urban layout that is well considered in relation to the rest of the village. Danefield Road and Pollards Way, built in the 1930s, followed Davis Crescent. Primarily bungalows, buildings in this development are not as architecturally distinct or considered as those on Davis Crescent and are not included within the Conservation Area.

Opened in 1930, the Village Hall [Figure 11] was largely funded by charity events held in the village. Despite the spurt of building that occurred in Pirton during the inter-war period, development across the village continued slowly. Some historic buildings were demolished and replaced in the later twentieth century, yet most development has occurred on areas of pasture and orchard space, such as on Cromwell Way and Bunyan Close, both excluded from the Conservation Area.

Pirton's Water Tower [Figure 12], a prominent feature of the Conservation Area's setting, was built in 1936 to hold water which was pumped from a spring at the northern edge of Prior's Hill. Until this point, many residents of the village collected their water from wells.

The latter half of the twentieth century saw further expansion of the village, at the edge of the Conservation Area's boundary. Between 1965 to 1990 Cromell Way and Bunyan Close were constructed, built on land previously used as orchards. There has been a gradual infill of green spaces within the village in the twentieth century, serving to highlight the significance of open areas which remain.



Figure 12: Pirton's Water Tower, Prior's Hill



Figure 13: Homes on Davis Crescent

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2.2 Designation of the Conservation Area

Pirton Conservation Area was designated in 1969 and amended in 1979. A Character Statement for the Pirton Conservation Area was created in 2020, which outlines the significance of the heritage asset. This document provides further analysis of the Conservation Area and is the first document to provide an appraisal and management plan for the Conservation Area.

2.3 Revisions to the Boundary

As part of this review, revisions to the Conservation Area boundary are proposed, to reflect changing methodologies of good practice and provide a clearer strategy which acknowledges the practicalities of Pirton's unique built environment. This review is line with the NPPF guidance on Conservation Areas (paragraph 191).

A map which marks the existing and proposed boundary is included on page 21 as Figure 20. written descriptions and accompanying photographs are including in the following two sections.

Necessary Reductions

Small sections of modern housing have been removed from the Conservation Area on Priors Hill [Figure 14], Hambridge Way and Walnut Tree Road. This is because the properties in these areas lack historic or architectural interest to justify their inclusion within the boundary.

Additions

Following the designation of the Conservation Area, two further assets within Pirton have been added to the National Heritage List for England. To



Figure 14: Properties on Priors Hill, suggested for removal from the Conservation Area



Figure 15: Holwell Road, proposed to be added to the Conservation Area

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recognise their historic value and contribution they make to the overall history of the area, these have both been added to the Conservation Area boundary. These are:

- Land to the east of Priors Hill and north of Danefield Road, Pirton, Hertfordshire (north-east of Hill Farm, Priors Hill), a scheduled monument [Figure 16],

and

- Barn at Wrights Farm, Grade II listed [Figure 17].

The scheduled monument [Figure 16] was designated in 2016, encompassing an Anglo-Saxon settlement to the west of the village. This field was previously excluded from the Conservation Area as its archaeological value was not known. The significance of this area was uncovered as part of preliminary works for the development of Saxon Rise, a new development on the edge of the village which was permitted in 2018 and has recently been completed.

The Wright's Farm Barn [Figure 16] was designated as a Grade II listed building in 2020. Dating from the late eighteenth century, the barn is an important surviving example of regional vernacular architecture. As part of this appraisal, the Conservation Area boundary has been amended to include this barn and the other remaining buildings at Wrights Farm, including associated fields, within the Conservation Area. This means that the boundary now extends across the far northern edge of the village, whereby the Wrights Farm complex was previously excluded. This section of the village is known as Burge End, with the fields surrounding Wrights Farm having historical links to the agricultural heritage of the village. Within this complex of buildings, the listed barn is surrounded by buildings of a low architectural and historic value. Sensitive redevelopment of the site would be beneficial to the setting of the listed barn.



Figure 16: The scheduled monument on Priors Hill, looking north toward Shillington Road. The top of Rectory Farmhouse is visible beyond the ridge of the hill



Figure 17: Wrights Farm, as seen from Burge Lane. The listed barn is on the left hand side of the image

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West Lane and a small section of Holwell Road, including Davis Crescent, has been added to the Conservation Area as an acknowledgment of the characteristics exhibited elsewhere in the Conservation Area that these roads possess, including the historic landscape quality of West Lane and the architectural value of Davis Crescent. Built immediately post World War one, the houses on Davis Crescent are an example of post war 'Homes for Heroes', marking an important phase of expansion for the village. built in semi-detached pairs or small terraces of four, the houses on Davis Crescent are arranged around a central green and all feature large front and rear gardens [Figure 18]. On West Lane, two terraces of four built to the same design mark the entrance to the crescent.

Other buildings on Holwell Road now included within the Conservation Area boundary are Victorian houses at the edge of the village, built in local Arlesey brick. 1 and 3 Holwell Road [Figure 19] are detached houses, with symmetrical front elevations and large gardens. Although altered, both houses possess features typical of the Conservation Area, such as slate roofs, decorative brick banding, arched lintels, chimneys and front gardens. Both have had a porch added to the front door and strongly resemble 67 High Street, at the centre of the village. 2-24 Holwell Road, also known as the 'Twelve Apostles Cottages' are proposed for addition to the Conservation Area due to their historic and architectural interest. Built in the late nineteenth century, the terrace of cottages is built in local white brick and retains its slate roof and chimneys. Although all of the cottages have lost their original windows, their appearance is in keeping with the centre of the village.

Two triangular sections of grass, one modern and one historic, which mark the intersections of north south routes Royal Oak Lane and Drovers Way with West Lane/Holwell Lane are also now included within the Conservation Area. These small greens at road junctions feature throughout the village and their inclusion is an acknowledgment of their importance as a distinctive landscape feature of Pirton.



Figure 18: Houses on Davis Crescent, which are proposed to be added to the Conservation Area



Figure 19: Houses on Holwell Road which are proposed to be added to the Conservation Area

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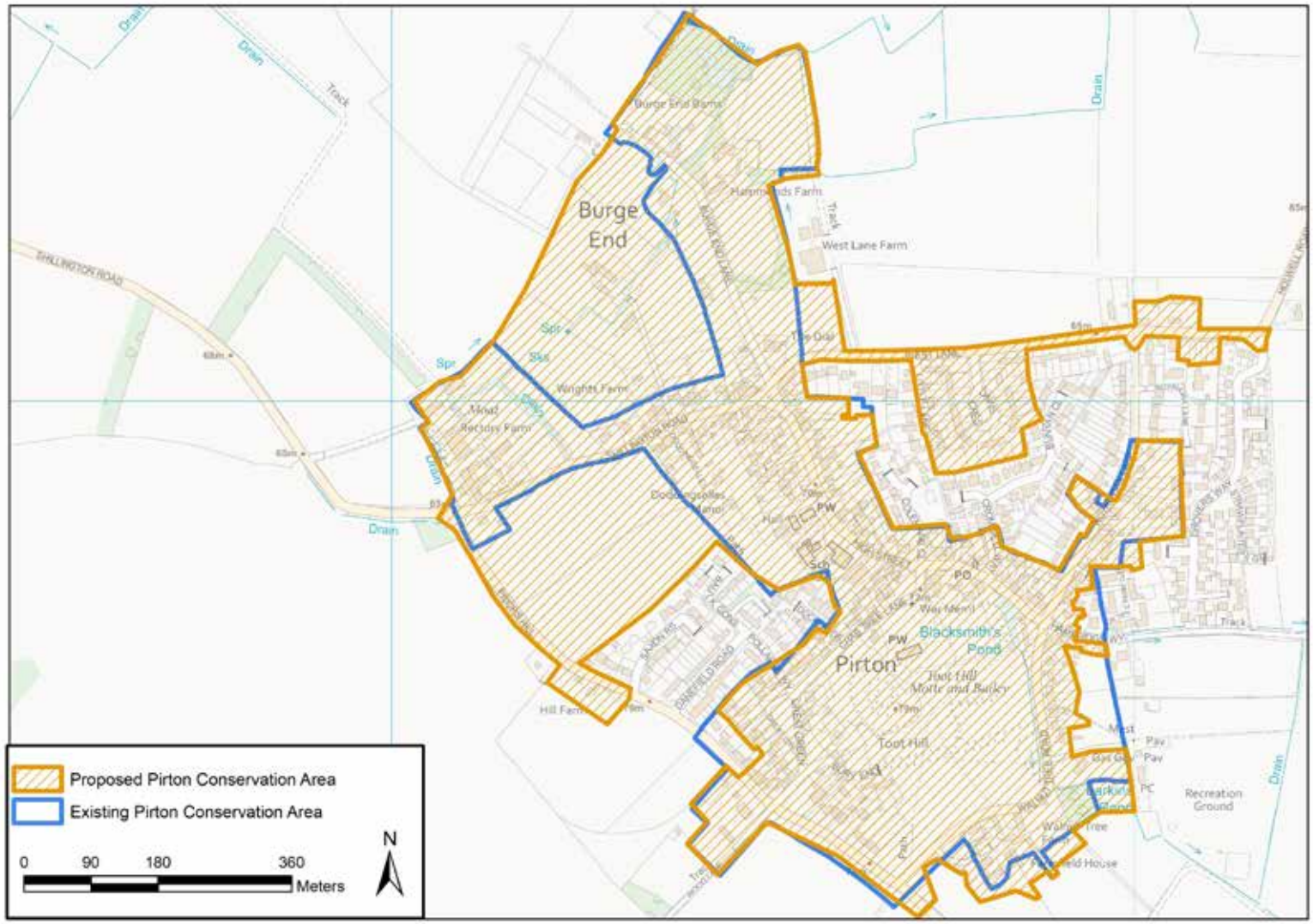

Figure 20: Map of the Pirton Conservation area showing the existing and proposed boundary

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Designated Heritage Assets

There are fifty-one listed buildings and three Scheduled Monuments within the Conservation Area. A map of these assets is included on the following page, as Figure 22.

Of these, one listed building is Grade I (the highest Grade), five are Grade II* and forty-five are Grade II.



Figure 21: St Mary's Parish church

Listed buildings within the Conservation Area range in date from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries, with the oldest building being St Mary's Parish Church (Grade I) [Figure 21] which has twelfth- century elements. The remainder of listed buildings are largely seventeenth-century dwellings, although there are examples of agricultural and residential buildings within the Conservation Area which pre-date these and have fifteenth or sixteenth- century origins.

Believed to be the oldest house in the village, Three Gables is a timber framed building, close to the boundary of the Bury. Originally an open hall house, the building is thought to date from the fifteenth century, if not earlier. Altered and extended in later decades, the house and its location provide an important insight into Pirton's history.

Pirton War Memorial, Grade II listed, was unveiled in 1920 to mark those who lost their lives in World War One, with later inscriptions added after World War Two. It is the most modern designated structure in the village.

The three scheduled monuments within the Conservation Area are:

- Toot Hill motte and bailey castle and shrunken medieval village at Pirton
- Anglo-Saxon settlement, and probable prehistoric ring ditches, west of Pirton village
- Moated site and associated enclosure at Rectory Farm

Together, the three scheduled monuments offer insight into the village's development and possess high archaeological interest. Further study and analysis of the three sites is anticipated to reveal further finds from the prehistoric through the medieval to modern period, with the importance and vulnerability of these site acknowledged in their scheduled status.

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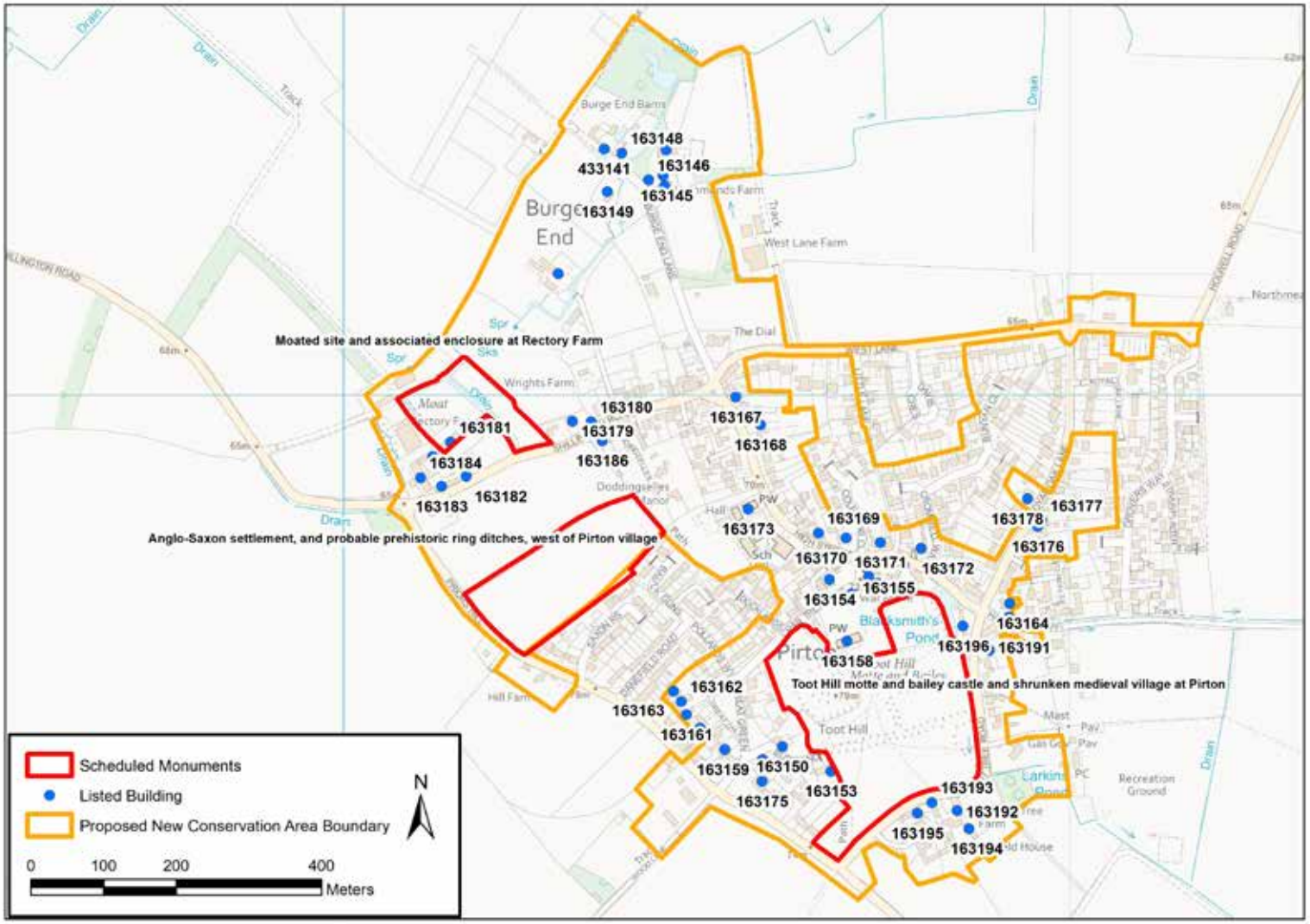

Figure 22: Map showing all designated heritage assets within the Pirton Conservation Area

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2.4 Non-Designated Heritage Assets

All buildings, features and planned landscapes within a Conservation Area make a contribution to its significance. These can be measured on a sliding scale of positive, to neutral, to negative contributors.

Heritage assets are defined in The NPPF as 'A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest.'

Not all heritage assets are designated. Although a building may not be included on the national list, this does not always mean it is of no heritage value. Buildings and other smaller features of the built environment such as fountains, railings, signs and landscaping can make a positive contribution to the appreciation of an area's historic interest and its general appearance.

Local listing is an important tool for local planning authorities to identify non-listed buildings and heritage assets which make a positive contribution to the locality. North Hertfordshire District Council currently has Registers of Buildings of Local Interest for Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth, Newnham, Knebworth (parish) and Royston.

Buildings of local interest are identified within the Pirton Neighbourhood Plan and within the 2020 character statement for the Pirton Conservation Area. Buildings which make a positive contribution to the Pirton Conservation Area have also been identified in the descriptions of each character area outlined in Section Three. It is recommended that these structures should be considered for formal local listing in the future by the local planning authority.



Figure 23: Nineteenth century cottages on the High Street, built in local Arlesey white brick with decorative red brick banding

Nevertheless, the list of buildings identified is not exhaustive and any planning application which affects the special interest of the Conservation Area should be assessed on its own merit.

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2.5 Heritage at Risk

Historic England publishes a yearly list of Heritage at Risk. To be included on the list, buildings must be listed at Grade II* listed or above, with the exception of Grade II listed places of worship and Grade II listed buildings in London, which can be included.

Other designated heritage assets can also be included on Historic England's register, including Conservation Areas, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Wreck Sites. Non-designated heritage assets are not considered by Historic England for inclusion on the Heritage at Risk Register.

There is one designated heritage asset within the Pirton Conservation Area on the At Risk Register at present, the Grade II* listed West Barn at Rectory Farm, Shillington Road. At the time of writing, discussions are currently ongoing regarding the barn's future, which is described as in 'poor' condition, class C priority for work (slow decay, no solution agreed).

The Conservation Area itself is not deemed to be at risk by Historic England. There are needless many areas of the Conservation Area which would highly benefit from enhancement which are identified in Section 4 of this document.

2.6 Archaeological Potential

Since 2005, Pirton has been one of the study sites of the Currently Occupied Rural Settlement (CORS) project. The project was initially run by Carenza Lewis at Cambridge University, from 2015 it has been led by Lewis' team at the University of Lincoln.

A number of archaeological excavations have been undertaken within and around the Pirton Conservation Area and reveal the potential of the area. Excavations to date have largely comprised of medieval and post-medieval settlement evidence and test pit surveys identifying hot spots of activity.

The Conservation Area has the potential to contain multi period deposits. Prehistoric activity is largely concentrated to the west of the Conservation Area although later prehistoric activity, including occupation of Bronze Age date, is scattered throughout the Conservation Area with a focus currently known at Pollards Way. Test pit surveys have identified largely continuous occupation within the present settlement since the Romans. Roman activity has largely been identified within and to the south of the current settlement area, comprising of both buildings and industrial activity. The majority of Saxon settlement activity is protected by a scheduled monument, located to the west of Pirton. The most common archaeological evidence identified within the Conservation Area will likely be medieval and post medieval remains comprising of features, structures and finds; examples of these have already been found along the High Street and around the castle.

A good survival of archaeological deposits has been found throughout the settlement and Conservation Area; this is particularly evident along the High Street, where truncation from later buildings can so often occur. Saxon burials (skeletal remains) and palaeoenvironmental remains,

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identified west adjacent to the Conservation Area, are also well-preserved. Excavation evidence has demonstrated the survival of bone and shell, as well as ceramics, metal objects and building materials . Whilst the post medieval settlement evidence is more likely to be sited along the street frontage, the backyard areas are more likely to contain preserved archaeological remains of the medieval settlement. The survival of the castle and earthworks, medieval street plan of Pirton, and the extensive listed buildings, is an important, well-preserved resource.

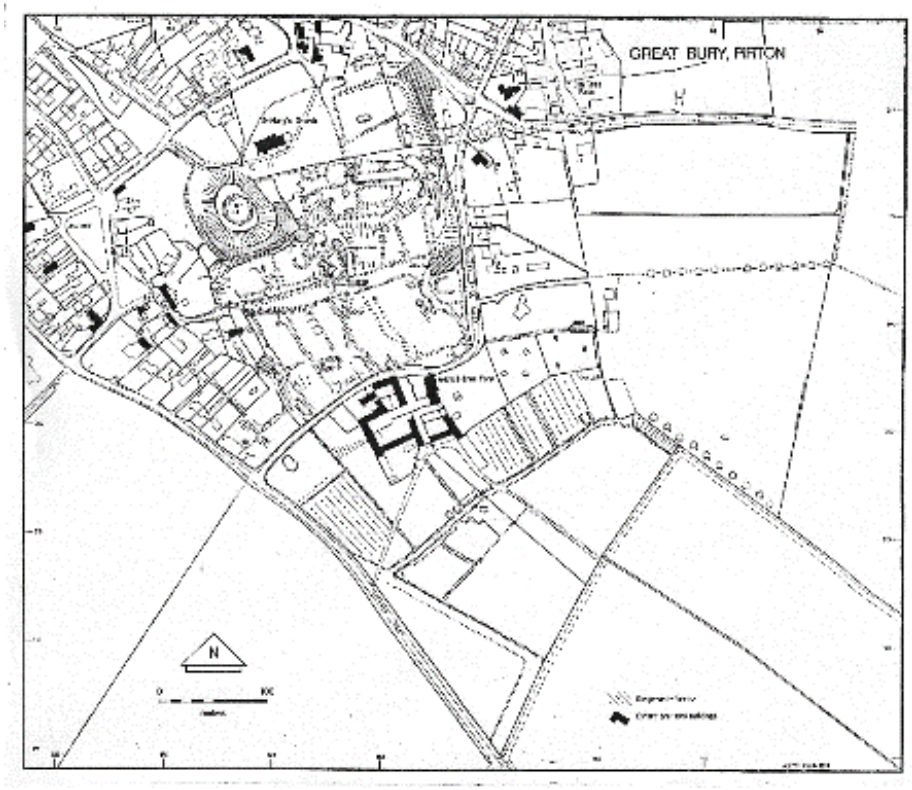

Figure 24: Diagram showing the results of a field survey conducted in 1987/8 of the earthworks to the SE of Walnut Tree Farm. © Gil Burleigh

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3. Assessment of Significance

3.1 Summary

Pirton Conservation Area is significant as an important, historic and continually occupied medieval settlement. For a small village, Pirton contains a wealth of historical features, evidenced by the high number of designations within the Conservation Area. The street plan and layout of the village is indicative of its phased development, providing an insight into Pirton's long running history. From the position of roads, buildings and greens, it is possible to determine how the village grew and declined, representing both local and national events.

Within the Conservation Area, built and archaeological features combine to create a pleasing, attractive example of a North Hertfordshire village. Architecturally, the Conservation Area exhibits a host of styles, although the overall appearance of Pirton is traditional and typical for the region. Timber framed medieval houses are nestled in between Victorian terraces, scattered with examples of former farmsteads and barn conversions in the village core. Local materials, such as Arlesey brick, dominate the street scenes, complemented by examples of thatch and rendered dwellings. Due to the geology of the area, stone is uncommon and features only on the most important of buildings, such as St Mary's Church. Hedgerow, grass verges and large garden plots give the Conservation Area a sylvan quality, interconnected with the surrounding agrarian landscape.

Although much of the village's past remains underground and is not easily discernible to the modern eye, the archaeological potential for further discovery stresses the Conservation Area's position as an important, highly valuable resource from which much can be learnt about past cultures. Toot Hill and The Bury dominate the Conservation Area due to their large size, however the two other scheduled monuments within the Conservation Area are too highly significant as areas of discernible history, indicative of how people lived and worked within Pirton in the last 2000 years.

Despite featuring multiple focal points and greens, Pirton Conservation Area does not have a dispersed appearance, due to the strong sense of interconnection between the village's distinct residential and agricultural areas created by the high number of footpaths and alleys. Pedestrian only routes allow for the Conservation Area to be well appreciated on foot, as it has been for centuries. Alleyways and paths create a sense of confinement and arrival, replicated across the Conservation Area as sections of built form within the denser village centre open out into pockets of green space. This allows for the rural appearance of the village to be maintained, with the retained sections of green space offering preserving links to Pirton's historic rural setting.

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3.2 Character Areas

For the purpose of this appraisal, the Conservation Area is divided into three Character Areas, loosely defined as:

- Character Area One: The Medieval Settlement (containing Toot Hill, St Mary's, Great Green and Walnut Tree Farm)
- Character Area Two: Northern Farmsteads (north of West Lane)
- Character Area Three: Post Medieval Residential Development (containing the High Street, Royal Oak Lane and Holwell Road)

The areas have been determined by building typology, historical development, land use and appearance. Many of the defining characteristics of each Character Area are present and repeated in other sections of the Conservation Area, which emphasises the local character and architectural significance of the Conservation Area. The following descriptions are not exhaustive, aiming instead to provide accessible accounts of each Character Area which will allow for an informed understanding of the Conservation Area's special interest and defining features.

Prevailing architectural styles, building materials, spatial planning, landscaping and boundary materials are detailed in the description of each Character Area to highlight the special architectural and historic value of the three zones. Photographs are included to aid the descriptions, providing examples where appropriate to inform the understanding of this document.

Each Character Area features designated heritage assets, a full list of the designations within the Conservation Area are included as Appendix 6.3 to this document. Designated buildings or structures which make a notable contribution to each Character Area are described in the following sections, however the omission of any buildings from the description does not mean they make no contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area. An assessment of the significance of each listed building and the contribution it makes to the special interest of the Conservation Area should be made when development or alterations are proposed.

Non-designated buildings or features deemed to reflect and enhance the special interest of the Conservation Area are also identified in the descriptions of each Character Area. These may be suitable for local listing; information regarding the definition of a non-designated heritage asset can be found in section 2.5 of this document. As with the listed structures, not all buildings that contribute to, or reinforce the character of the Conservation Area have been identified within this appraisal of the Conservation Area. Other buildings which feature architectural detailing typical of the Conservation Area, for example, would also be considered to contribute to the significance of the Conservation Area. Future development must be assessed on an individual basis, remaining considerate of Pirton Conservation Area's special interest, with the aim to enhance or preserve those aspects which contribute to its significance.

Key views have been identified within each Character Area, and views from outside the Conservation Area from which its special interest can be recognised are also highlighted where appropriate. There may, nevertheless, be other views of significance within or beyond the Conservation Area's boundary which contribute to how it is appreciated and understood. Any proposals for development within the Conservation Area, or its environs, should thus not only consider the views identified within this document but also any others which may be relevant or highlighted as part of a bespoke assessment of that proposal.

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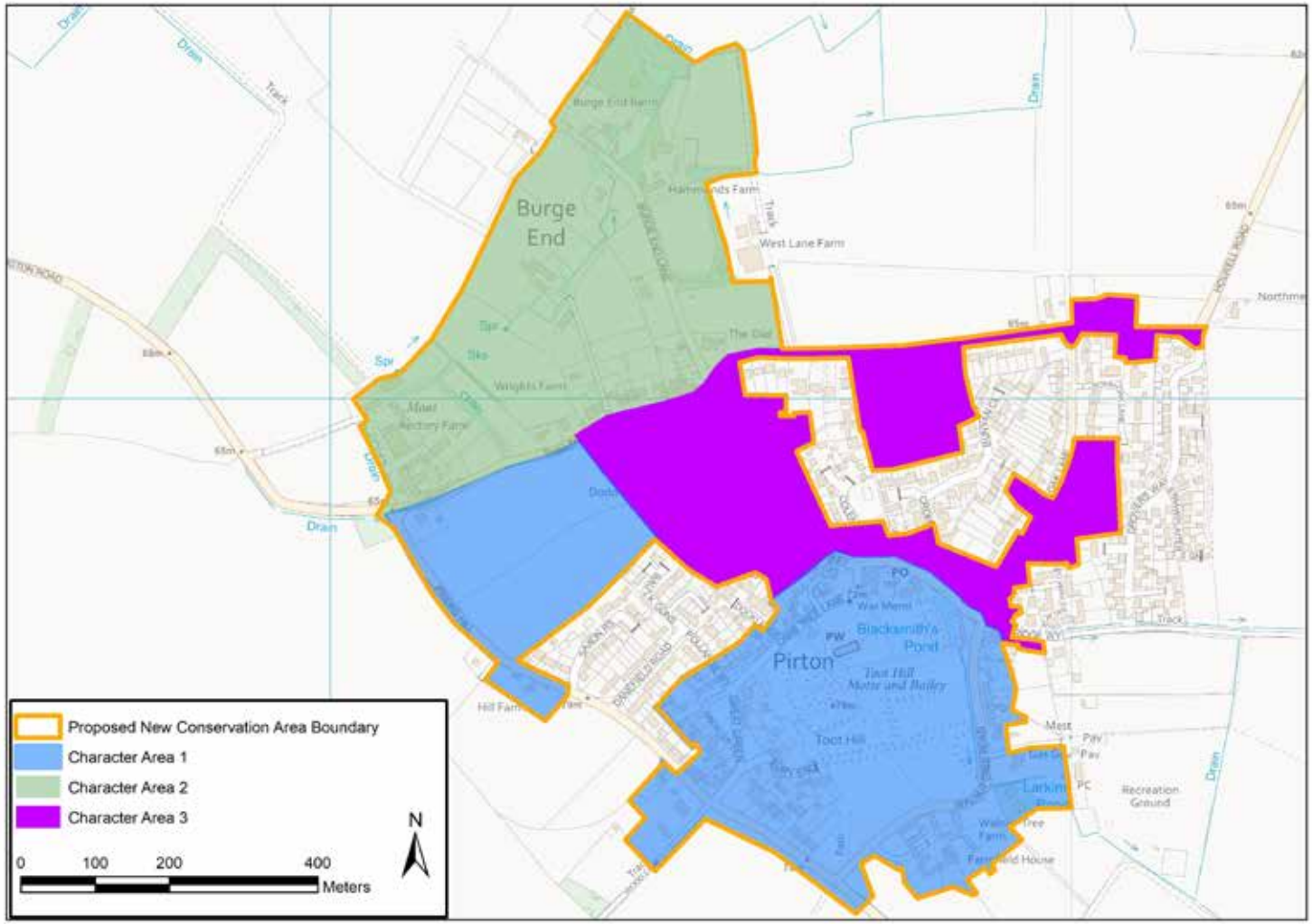

Figure 25: Map of Character Areas, Proposed Pirton Conservation Area

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3.3 Character Area One, The Medieval Settlement

Description

Character Area One can loosely be described as the medieval urban core of Pirton, featuring the earthworks of Toot Hill Motte and Bailey Castle and The Bury, St Marys Church and houses on Great Green. Although buildings in other Character Areas may be contemporary in age, their position in relation to the castle suggests they would have been outliers to the village centre, therefore they are not included within Character Area One. The Character Area's irregular shape is due to the exclusion of twentieth and twenty first century housing on Saxon Rise, Danefield Road and Baulk Gardens from the Conservation Area.

The Character Area is dominated by Toot Hill and The Bury, which are maintained as an area of publicly accessible green space. Footpaths criss-cross through the scheduled monument, with the space acting as a frequently used pedestrian route through the village. From within the monument itself, built form appears far removed and distant, partially shielded by green screening created by the presence of trees along the monument's boundaries.

Historic buildings within the Character Area are largely late to post-medieval in date and timber framed. Later nineteenth or twentieth century infill buildings, where present, are typically brick constructions. Walnut Tree Farm located immediately south of The Bury is sixteenth century in age and would have stood in conjunction with now lost buildings on The Bury. Priors Hill scheduled monument, in the northwestern section of the Character Area, although now seemingly an agricultural field, in fact contains important remains from the prehistoric and medieval period.

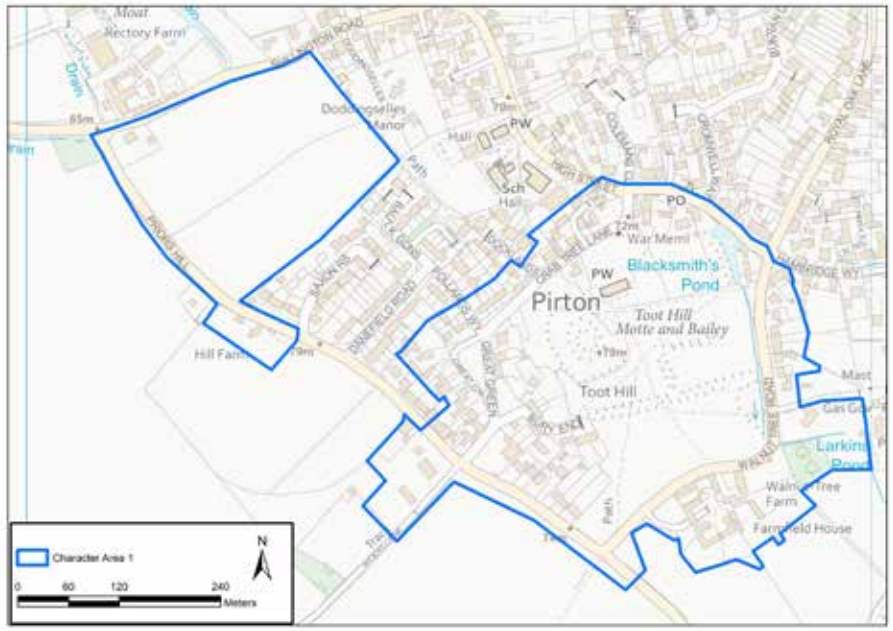

Figure 26: Character Area One

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Layout and Land Usage

The Character Area circles out from the site of Pirton's castle, with surviving buildings built along its edge [Figure 27]. Walnut Tree Road and Priors Hill frame the castle monument, with Great Green nestled close to the monument's northeastern edge. St Mary's Parish Church, a focal point of the whole village, is central to the northern edge of the Character Area.

Due to the large size of Toot Hill and The Bury, much of the Character Area is open grassland, used as recreational space. Within this Character Area buildings are almost exclusively residential, with the exception of St Mary's church.

Landscaping and Open Spaces

Character Area One features swathes of open space, due to the presence of two scheduled monuments. Although publicly accessible, the nature and management plan of both Toot Hill and Priors Hill monuments means that archaeological remains are largely retained in situ. Within Toot Hill and The Bury monument, earthworks are discernible only as grooves and ridges within the landscape, hidden by pockets of tress and vegetation.

St Mary's Church Yard, north of the church, is a well maintained, landscaped area. Bounded by low lying stone walls, the church yard has a tranquil quality, detached from the village with defined exit and entry points marked by gates, unlike the scheduled monuments. At the churchyard's northern edge, the War Memorial [Figure 29] provides a focal point to the lane, complimented by the backdrop of the church and associated church yard.

The Blacksmith's Pond [Figure 28], once part of the castle's moat, is an important ecological feature for the village, with wildlife present. As an urban element, the pond provides a further area for respite for residents and visitors to the village, featuring a bench and small area of paving at its northern edge. Its appearance, framed by willow trees, bullrushes and a small section of post and rail fencing, is calming and naturalistic, adding to the rural, tranquil village feel of the Conservation Area. The pond is



Figure 27: Earthworks in The Bury, with St Mary's Church behind



Figure 28: The Pond, High Street



Figure 29: The War Memorial

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not within the boundary of the scheduled monument.

Great Green reinforces this sylvan feeling. As a section of the Conservation Area less affected by traffic, Great Green again creates a feeling of seclusion and calm, with buildings around the green somewhat concealed due to their position and intervening areas of garden space. The green remains a focal point for the village, featuring a May Pole at its centre [Figure 30].

Throughout the Character Area, front gardens are common, with buildings typically set back from the road. Where they do front the street, buildings are typically much older in age and smaller worker's cottages, such as those on Bury End. Many properties are detached, and almost all feature large rear gardens, due to the lack of infill and urbanisation of the village that has occurred.



Figure 30: Great Green, Featuring the May Pole

Key Buildings

Designated

Within the Character Area there are twenty-one listed buildings.

The Parish Church of St Mary [Figure 31]. Grade I listed, Pirton's Parish Church has a crenelated tower and low spire, which means it is not visible throughout the village. The building's position, however, is important and asserts its intended role as focal point for the village. Built in stone, unlike other building's within Pirton, the church has a humble appearance, betraying the wealth and intent which would have enabled its construction. Restored and renewed in numerous phases subsequent to its twelfth century construction, the church is multi-phased with a largely nineteenth century interior.

Three Gables [Figure 32]. Believed to be the oldest building in the village, Three Gables is a timber framed and rendered house located on Bury End, immediately southeast of the demolished castle. Grade II* listed, the building is a fine example of a fifteenth century (if not older) open-hall house with later inserted floor and extensions.



Figure 31: St Mary's Parish Church

Docwra Manor. Also located on Bury End, Docwra Manor is another late-medieval building, gaining its name from Thomas Docwra, for whom the building was constructed. Grade II listed, the core of the building dates from 1609 and is the surviving wing of a much larger building, now demolished. Unusually, the building is partially constructed in limestone rubble; it is the only stone residential building within the Conservation Area. Extended in the twentieth century, it was used as a pub in the nineteenth century, one of several pubs operational in Pirton during that time. It is Grade II listed.

Buildings on Great Green. One of the oldest surviving complexes of buildings, there are

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five listed buildings on the western side of Great Green. These are all timber framed structures, rendered and ranging in date from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries.

Crabtree Lane [Figure 35. Similar to Great Green, there are a cluster of timber framed listed buildings on Crabtree Lane, close to the High Street. Dating largely from the medieval period, their position in relation to the church is testament to their age.

Walnut Tree Farm and associated barns [Figure 33]. Located on the southern edge of The Bury, Walnut Tree Farm would once have been more interconnected to the village core. The farmhouse is Grade II listed, with associated barns benefiting from their own designation. No longer a working farm, the ancillary buildings are now in residential use, although their block plan and the nature of conversion allows the complex to remain discernible as a farmstead.

Non-designated

The Old Rectory, 1 Priors Hill [Figure 38. A red brick detached house, The Old Rectory is located on the western edge of Priors Hill Set back from the remainder of the Conservation Area, the building is set within large grounds which extend into the agricultural fields beyond.

6 Priors Hill [Figure 39]. Constructed in white



Figure 32: Three Gables



Figure 33: Barn at Walnut Tree Farm



Figure 34: 5 Crabtree Lane



Figure 35: Crabtree Lane



Figure 36: 4-6 Walnut Tree Road



Figure 37: Crabtree House

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Arlesey brick, number 6 is a symmetrical, hipped roof dwelling set back behind iron railings. The building retains its awning covers on the front elevation and features a semi-circular fanlight above the front door with single pane, plate glass sash windows.

7, Great Green. Two bays, with a central doorcase, the building features bay windows and roughcast rendered walls with a slate roof.

The Motte and Bailey Public House [Figure 40]. Occupying a prominent location at the junction of Great Green and Crabtree Lane, the pub is an early twentieth century building.

Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

Within the Character Area, buildings are roofed in a variety of finishes, including slate, plain tile and thatch. On older buildings, red clay tiles are most common, however many have lost their original roof coverings. Where plain tiles have been removed, many houses have been re-roofed in cementitious tiles which have a comparatively flat appearance.

Rooflights are not common within the Character Area and, where present, distract from the traditional appearance of the roofscape.



Figure 38: The Old Rectory



Figure 39: 6 Priors Hill



Figure 40: The Motte and Bailey, Great Green



Figure 41: Roof coverings within the Character Area are varied yet predominantly traditional



Figure 42: Example of exposed brick nogging



Figure 43: Example of Flemish bond brickwork with imperial bricks

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Buildings within the Character Area are predominantly two storeys in height, with some only one and half storey dwellings tall. Chimneys are a prominent part of the roofscape, with many houses featuring multiple stacks.

Walls

Exposed timber framing is common, with buildings also featuring rough cast render or brick nogging between the timber studs.

Red brick [Figure 43] is most common on older properties, however nineteenth-century dwellings are almost exclusively built in local white coloured Arlesey brick, often with red brick decorative details such as window surrounds or banding.

Feather edged weatherboarding, painted black, features on outbuildings and former farm buildings within the Character Area.

Windows and Doors

Windows and doors vary, subject to a building's age. Casement windows are most common on timber framed buildings, where windows are typically small in proportion to the building. Nineteenth century buildings feature sash windows where still present, however many have seen their original windows replaced with uPVC top hung casements.



Figure 44: Hedgerow is a dominant boundary treatment



Figure 45: Example of picket fencing used as a boundary treatment



Figure 46: Post and chain fencing on Great Green

Timber panelled doors are most common, painted in a variety of colours. Fanlights, where present, are indicative of the trend for 'polite' architecture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Porch extensions are uncommon, although have been added to some dwellings. Pitched canopies are more common, above entrances to dwellings.

Boundary Treatments

Hedgerow [Figure 44] and low-lying wooden fences are the dominant boundary type, with few brick boundary walls present around residential dwellings. Where present, brick is typically used for gate posts, rather than as a defined brick boundary wall.

The church yard, featuring a rubble and brick wall, is the most formalised space in the Character Area, however the low height of the church's boundary allows for visual permeability from the church yard into the monument to the south.

As with the residential boundary treatments, the boundaries for the scheduled monuments are mostly marked by hedgerow, gaps within which allow for pedestrian access into the sites. Toot Hill and The Bury is the more formal of the two monuments, featuring a stile and kissing

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gates at designated entrance points.

Great Green is similarly marked in a minimal fashion, with sections of the green bound by post and chains, as a parking deterrent.

Public Realm

Unlike the other Character Areas, Character Area One features large swathes of publicly accessible land. Green and grassed, the Toot Hill and The Bury scheduled monument [Figure 47] provides recreational space within the heart of the Conservation Area. Here the land is largely open, although pockets of trees add a wild, woodland quality and places of shelter.

Great Green and The Churchyard are comparatively formal spaces, more closely overlooked by surrounding houses and used for community events.

Street furniture is extremely minimal, limited to a bench next to the pond, a scattering of waste bins and a letter box.



Figure 47: Viewpoint 3, toward St Mary's Church, taken from within the Scheduled Monument

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Views

Key views within the Character Area are identified on the adjacent map. This is not an exhaustive list and other important transitory views may be achieved when moving through the Character Area, either toward important buildings of the wider landscape. Diurnal and seasonal changes may also reveal or conceal views and should be considered as part of any proposal for change within the Conservation Area.

Important views from the edge of the Character Area and within the Toot Hill scheduled monument toward the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty offer an attractive backdrop to the Conservation Area, set next to the rolling hills of the Chilterns. This provides context to the Conservation Area, reinforcing its rural location and relationship with surrounding agricultural landscape.



Figure 48: Viewpoint 6, looking across the Scheduled Monument on Prior's Hill



Figure 49: Viewpoint 3, from within Toot Hill



Figure 50: View 5, looking south west to the AONB from Hitchin Road

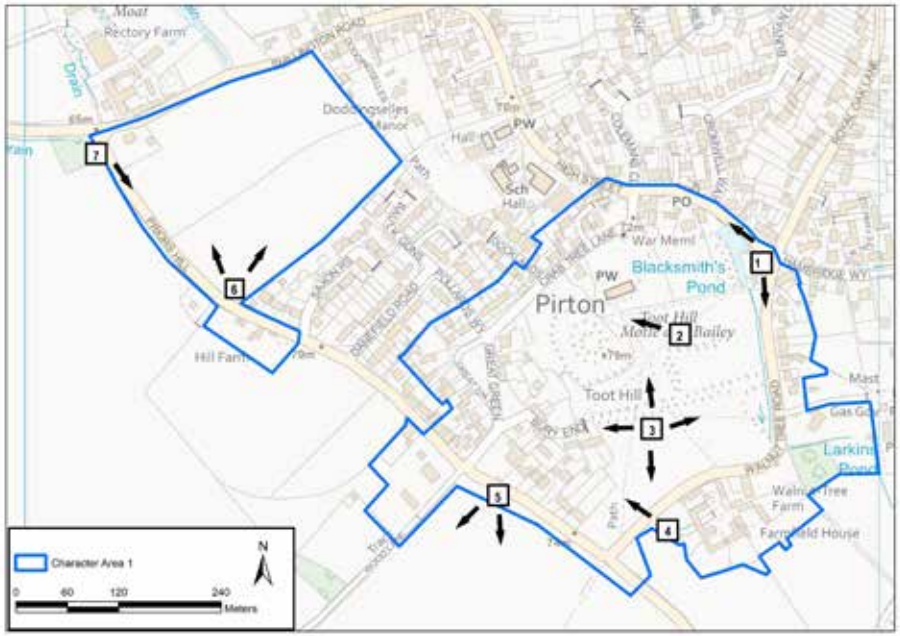

Figure 51: Map of important views in Character Area One

Viewpoint 1, at the centre of the village, has high aesthetic value, providing views toward the Duck Pond and St Mary's Church. The high concentration of historic and listed buildings is visually very apparent, with the positioning of buildings' framing views along the street.

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3.4 Character Area Two, Northern Farms

Description

The second Character Area encompasses a small section of housing on Shillington Road and four historic farms on Pirton's norther edge, within which there are listed buildings: Rectory Farm, Wrights Farm, Burge End Farm and Hammond's Farm. All four farms have historic value, and Hammond's Farm and Rectory Farm are late-medieval in origin. The most recently constructed of the four farms, Wrights Farm is the least complete, with the farmhouse now lost. A surviving barn, listed in 2020, is eighteenth century in origin.

Although once more disconnected from the core of the village than present, Hammonds Farm and Burge End Farm retain a sense of detachment from surrounding development. The two farmsteads are accessed via Burge End Lane, a narrow, tarmacked route lined with hedgerow and trees. Burge End Farm.at the northern edge of the lane, is seventeenth century in date, whilst Hammond's Farm is early sixteenth century.

Rectory Farm, at the edge of the village and Conservation Area, is a large, moated complex, dating from the medieval period. The moat is a scheduled monument, evidential of a medieval trend for wealthy manorial, aristocratic residences to be protected by wide, water filled ditches. The moat at Rectory Farm is particularly unusual as it has a double island, assumed to have different functions. The farmhouse itself is a replacement building dating from the seventeenth century, predated by surviving barns which are fifteenth-sixteenth century in date.

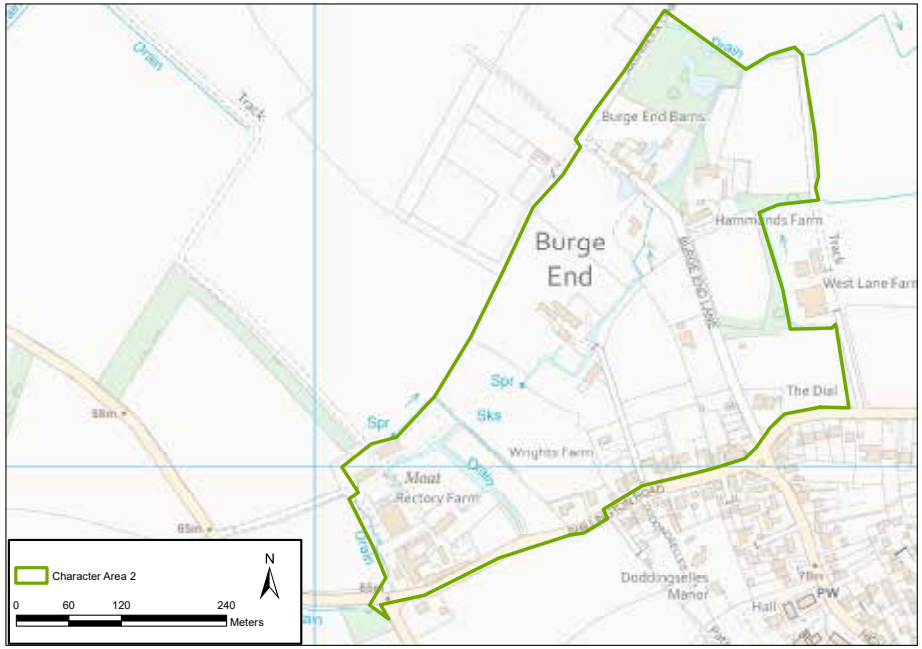

Figure 52: Map of Character Area Two

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Layout and Land Usage

The Character Area is predominantly comprised of areas of open fields with historic associations to the listed buildings within the Character Area. Shillington Road is partially included within the Character Area and is an important historic route running east-west across the northern edge of Pirton.

Domestic buildings on Shillington Road front the road, facing in toward the centre of the village, benefitting from an active relationship with the streetscene.

Land use is primarily residential and garden curtilage, with the fields at Wrights Farm in the centre of the Character Area not currently in agricultural use.

Landscaping and Open Spaces

Landscaping is a mixture of formalised garden spaces and areas of agrarian land, demarked by hedgerows. Much of the Character Area is open, which means that from publicly accessible areas, such as the footpath and Burge End Lane, wide views are afforded over the centre of the Character Area.

Within garden spaces, particularly around Rectory Farm, there is a sense of containment and seclusion, contrasting sharply with the appearance of the surrounding agricultural fields.



Figure 54: View looking west to Wrights Farm from Burge End Lane

Key Buildings

There are fifteen listed buildings within the Character Area, including four Grade II* buildings, The Tithe Barn at Rectory Farm, Rectory Farmhouse and Hammond's Farmhouse. The remainder are Grade II.

Designated

Rectory Farmhouse [Figure 55]. Once the manorial building, the building is now a farmhouse. Dating from the early seventeenth century, the building likely replaced an earlier structure. Built in clunch and red brick, the building has roughcast rendered gables, with an adjoining, single storey brewhouse to the rear.

Tithe Barn at Rectory Farmhouse [Figure 56]. Grade II* listed, fifteenth/early sixteenth century. Timber framed on a narrow brick plinth, the building would have been used to store 'tithes', produce given as tax payment. Tall and rectangular, the building is ten bays long and aisled.

Dovecote, Stable and Granary at Rectory Farm. Multiphased, the three interconnected buildings include a seventeenth- century dovecote, used to house pigeons. The granary building features a raised floor, to protect the grain from pests and vermin.

Hammond's Farm. Grade II* listed, Hammond's Farmhouse is an early- sixteenth century former hall house, modified post its initial construction to include a floor, stair tower and additional wing. Timber framed and rendered, the house is on the eastern side of Burge End Lane and surrounded by three, individually listed outbuildings.

Burge End Farmhouse [Figure 57]. Dating from the seventeenth century, Burge End Farmhouse

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is a timber- framed building, refaced in brick in the eighteenth century. The building retains many original features and is built to a lobby entry-plan form.

Outbuilding at Burge End Farm. Timber- framed and boarded, the outbuilding fates from the seventeenth century with later alterations.

Barn at Wrights Farm. Eighteenth- century in date and almost entirely complete, the barn is a surviving structure of a now almost entirely lost vernacular farmstead.

28, Shillington Road and individually listed barn [Figure 59]. A sixteenth- century or earlier open hall house with inserted floor. The building features sections of exposed framing. The barn has been converted to residential amenity space, including the addition of three rooflights on the western roof slope.

Non-designated

Hanscombe Cottage, 14 Shillington Road [Figure 60]. A two-bay cottage with central doorway, pebble dashed and painted with timber sash windows.

2-12 Shillington Road. A small terrace of nineteenth century cottages, built in gault brick with red brick banding.



Figure 55: Rectory Farmhouse



Figure 56: Tithe Barn at Rectory Farmhouse



Figure 57: Burge End Farmhouse



Figure 58: Barn at Burge End Farmhouse



Figure 59: 28 Shillington Road

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71 Shillington Road. A gault brick and gabled two storey detached dwelling, sympathetically extended with an additional two bays on the eastern side.

Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

Red plain tiles are the most common roof coverings, cementitious tiles are also present on twentieth century infill dwellings. There is one example of a thatched dwelling and some roofed in slate. Due to the age of many of the buildings, several buildings feature irregular roofs, with gablets and unusual junctions between roof planes.

Chimneys are common feature, located at the centre of buildings and/or on the exterior wall. Chimney pots have been lost on many dwellings, although their stacks remain. Ornamentation is minimal, with buildings exclusively two storeys in height, some with attic accommodation.

Solar panels are present on some properties, however where visible in the street scene they are a detracting, modern element. Similarly, satellite dishes are an incongruous feature.

Walls

Render is common, with elements of exposed timber framing featuring on multiple buildings. Where they are not rendered, some timber-framed buildings feature brick nogging infill panels or are clad in timber weatherboard. Boarding is exclusively found on ancillary buildings until the twentieth century. Infill buildings on Shillington Road, built in the late-twentieth century, do feature cladding or tile hanging at first floor level.

Brick is used for the Victorian terrace at 2-12 Shillington Road and late- twentieth century dwellings also on Shillington Road. Like other properties in the High Street and on Holwell Road, 2-12 Shillington Road are gault brick with red brick banding.

Windows and Doors

Windows are typically casement design, timber-framed units. Some buildings feature sash windows, however many sashes have been lost and replaced with top hung casements.

uPVC windows, where present, are largely on modern or non-designated buildings. Where present, uPVC windows have been installed in existing openings, meaning that all older buildings have retained their arched lintels, an important characteristic of the village.

Dormer windows and rooflights are not common features and loft conversions are not



Figure 60: 14 Shillington Road



Figure 61: An example of where modern uPVC windows have been installed to replace wooden sashes

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commonplace.

There is a wide variety of doors within the Character Area, the majority of which are timber close boarded or panelled units. Side lights and fanlights are not common door features. Where properties have lost their original doors (eg. on 2-12 Shillington Road), two panel glazed doors are prevalent.

Doors are typically simple in design, without pedimented or ornamented doorcases. Porches are uncommon, with few buildings featuring canopies above the main entrance. Where canopies are present, they are simple in design, either flat or featuring a small pitch. Doors are typically flush with the external wall of a building.

Boundary Treatments

Like the remainder of the Conservation Area, boundary treatments are informal and consist primarily of hedgerow, picket or post and rail fencing. Iron railings are not a common feature, nor are formal entranceways or gates.

Brick walls, where present, are low in height and, if nineteenth century or earlier, built in white Arlesey brick with wooden gates Twentieth century walls are typically red fletton brick, also low in height.

Parking is generally off road, with houses benefitting from large plots which allow for residents to park at the side or in front of their property.

Public Realm

There are very few areas of public realm. Pedestrian provision is restricted to one side of Shillington Road, where vehicular traffic is dominant. Footpaths and bridleways leading out of the Character Area do, nevertheless, provide pedestrian interconnectivity to other sections of the Conservation Area and out into the wider landscape.

At the junctions of the High Street and Priors Hill with Shillington Road, there are small triangular pockets of grass, as is typical for the village. These help to reduce the speed of vehicular traffic and reinforce the informal, rural, village character of the Conservation Area.

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Views

The location of key views within the Character Area are identified on the adjacent map.

Particularly important are incidental views toward historic buildings which are somewhat concealed by tree cover and the building's set back from the road.

At the northern edge of the Character Area, on the Hertfordshire border, wide views across the Bedfordshire landscape can be achieved, showcasing Pirton's isolated position and providing insight into its position in relation to other settlements, such as Holwell, which is visible to the north east.



Figure 62: Burge End Lane, View 2 on the map



Figure 63: View 4, looking south at the junction of Prior's Hill and Shillington Road



Figure 64: The barn at Rectory Farm, as seen from Shillington Road. View 4 on the map

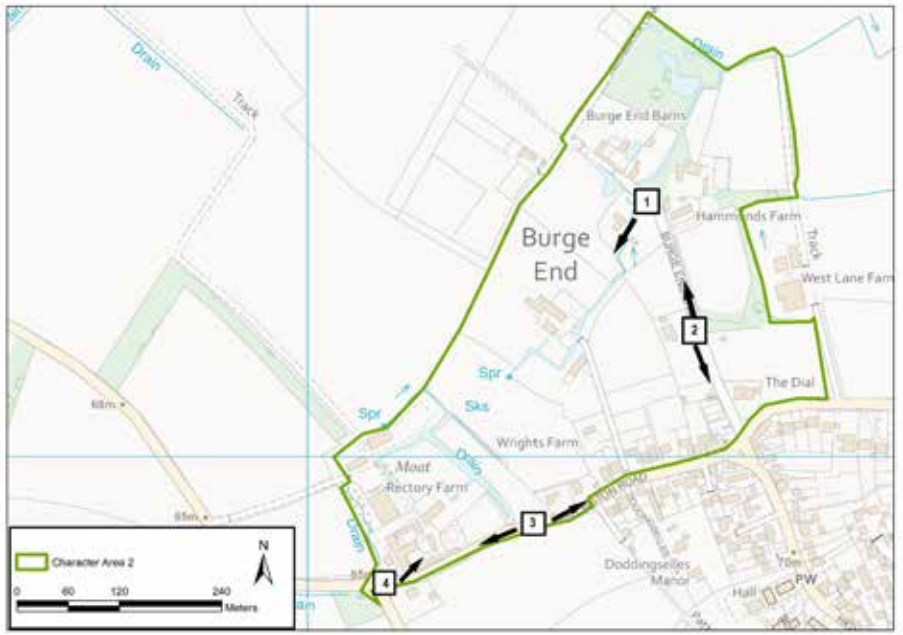

Figure 65: Map of the key viewpoints within Character Area Two

Viewpoint 4, toward Rectory Farm, showcases the historic and architectural interest of the farmstead, which includes the Grade II* listed Tithe Barn [Figure 64].

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3.5 Character Area Three, The High Street and Royal Oak Lane

Description

Character Area Three represents a later phase in the village's development, east of the medieval village and castle. Buildings have a mixture of residential and amenity functions; within this Character Area there is the village hall, school, a public house and a shop.

Most buildings within the Character Area date from the nineteenth century or later, meaning they are predominantly brick constructions, rather than timber framed and rendered. Good examples of Arlesey brick buildings are present on the High Street and on Holwell Road, the light colour and appearance of which are a strong component of the Character Area. Where they do feature, older buildings within in the Character Area typically date from the seventeenth century and would have once been outliers to the village core, such as Elm Tree Farm and 17 High Street. Buildings from the post-medieval period within the Character Area are almost all listed, due to their age and architectural interest.

Sections of modern infill have expanded the village, encroaching upon the Conservation Area's boundary and infilling sections of land between the High Street and Royal Oak Lane, including Davis Crescent, within the Conservation Area boundary. Built in 1920, the crescent has a strong designed layout which references the appearance of Great Green, in Character Area One.

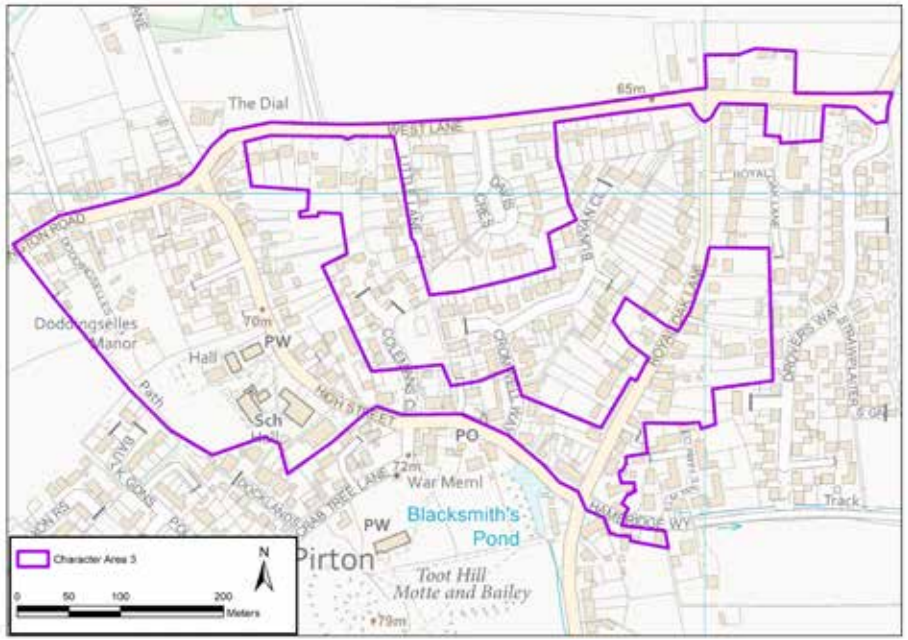

Figure 66: Map of Character Area Three

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Layout and Land Usage

The Character Area is roughly triangular in shape, including two spine routes out of the village (the High Street and Royal Oak Lane) and a connecting road which runs east-west at the northern edge of the village, Holwell Road. At the junction of each road, sections of grass are present which have a widening effect, contrasting to the narrowness and undulation of the roads they adjoin.

Grass verges are a prominent part of the Character Area, which lacks formal pedestrian provision in places, often only featuring a pavement on one side of the road.

Land usage is split between residential, commercial and municipal use, including almost all of Pirton's amenities. The Village Hall, a chapel, the school, The Fox and village shop are all within the Character Area.

Landscaping and Open Spaces

Little Green [Figure 67], at the junction of Royal Oak Lane and the High Street, is the largest of publicly accessible open spaces within the Character Area. The school, Methodist Chapel and The Fox PH do, nevertheless, feature areas of associated land which have a community function. To the rear and front of the village hall the land is partially tarmacked for car parking.



Figure 67: Little Green



Figure 68: Grass Verges on Royal Oak Lane



Figure 69: Open Space at Cromwell Cottage



Figure 70: Green Space at the junction of the High Street and West Lane



Figure 71: The Fox Pub (left) and associated garden



Figure 72: The Village Hall, High Street

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Pockets of grass verges and small greens are a dominant feature of the Character Area, some featuring benches and offering areas of respite for residents and visitors to the village [Figure 56]. These small greens help to prevent the Character Area from appearing too urban, retaining a link to the surrounding rural landscape and emphasising the loose grain of development within the village.

Key Buildings

Designated

There are seven listed buildings within the Character Area, including the Methodist Chapel, The Fox PH and a selection of older residential dwellings. Many of the listed buildings are post-medieval in age and once would have been more scattered in appearance than they are today. For a details of all the listed buildings in the Pirton Conservation Area, see Appendix 6.3.

The Methodist Chapel [Figure 73]. Built in 1906, the building is constructed in red brick with steep slate roofs. The chapel features Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau elements, an elaborate frontage and stained-glass glazing.

The Fox PH [Figure 71]. Dating from the seventeenth century, re-fronted in the eighteenth century. The pub is timber framed and two storeys high. Originally a lobby entry house and two cells wide, the building was extended in the eighteenth century with an additional two bays, lower in height.

17 High Street [Figure 74]. Built circa 1600, the house has a lobby entry plan form, thatched roof and roughcast rendered walls. From the street only the side of the building can be seen, the front of which is perpendicular to the High Street.

Cromwell Cottage [Figure 69]. Grade II listed, the building has a nineteenth-century brick frontage which disguises its sixteenth century origins. The rear range of the building is the oldest section, featuring exposed timber framing.

41-45 High Street. Seventeenth century in age, with later alterations, the small terrace was originally two dwellings rather than three. Timber framed, the building is set back from the road and features rough cast render and casement windows.

Elm Tree Farmhouse. Dating from the sixteenth century but primarily seventeenth century in age, Elm Tree Farmhouse was the farmhouse for the land between Hambridge Way and Holwell Road, now infilled with modern housing. Elm Tree Farm was closely linked to Little Green Farmhouse, which was located immediately to its north and demolished in the early twentieth century.

Orchard Cottage. Built circa 1600, Orchard Cottage is at the bottom of the High Street, on



Figure 73: The Methodist Chapel



Figure 74: 17 High Street, largely concealed from the road due to its elevated position



Figure 75: 21 Royal Oak Lane

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the route to Burge End, in the northern part of the village. Timber framed and rendered; the house has a steep slate roof which would have once been thatched.

Non-designated

Properties which feature typical local and traditional materials, such as Arlesey brick, lime render, natural slate and handmade tiles contribute positively to the Character Area. The following have been identified as positive contributors to the Conservation Area due to their display of such materials and relatively unaltered appearance.

1 and 3 Holwell Road [see Figure 76 which depicts number 3]. Both detached, these two buildings are typical in appearance for the nineteenth century, with a roof gabled at the sides and featuring a central doorway, with windows either side. Windows across the front of each house are wooden sashes. Built in gault brick, both houses are simply designed, with red brick used as ornamentation at the eaves, around windows and as strip bands across the buildings. Although they have been extended, each house retains large gardens to the side and rear.

2-24 Holwell Road, '12 Apostles Terrace' [Figure 77]. Constructed in the late- nineteenth century, this terrace of twelve cottages is simple



Figure 76: 3 Holwell Road



Figure 77: 2-24 Holwell Road



Figure 78: 19 and 21 High Street



Figure 79: Barn on the High Street



Figure 80: 51-65 High Street



Figure 81: 81-91 High Street

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in appearance, with each house one bay wide.

45-51 West Lane. A further example of Victorian terraced housing, these five cottages on West Lane are constructed in red brick and each one bay wide. Although the terrace is seven houses long, dwellings on the western edge of the terrace are excluded due to the alterations that have taken place, including the addition of render on the first floor.

19 and 21 High Street [Figure 78]. Built as almshouses, Hammonds Cottages, as they are known, are a single storey brick pair of cottages, set back from the High Street in an elevated position. They feature stone window and door surrounds. There is a plaque on each dwelling, located in the centre of the gable, which read 'Hammonds Almhouses' and 'Built 1607, Rebuilt 1877' respectively.

51-65 High Street. [Figure 80] Short terrace of two storey brick cottages with slate roof, including the village shop.

81-91 High Street [Figure 81]. A short terrace of six brick cottages, with the flanking cottages featuring a street fronting gable. Number 81, on the northern edge, has been extended to the side.

Building Materials and Boundary Treatments

Roofs

Welsh Slate and red plain tile are the most common roof coverings, with examples of thatch and cementitious tiles also present. Some properties feature bargeboards and ridge tiles, but on the whole roofs are unadorned.

Chimneys are common feature, located at the centre of buildings and/or on the exterior wall. Chimney pots have been lost on many dwellings, although their stacks remain. Chimneys are typically simple in design, perhaps featuring dentiled or contrasting courses of brick but with little ornamentation.

Walls

White Arlesey Brick is the most common building material within the Character Area. Produced locally in the nineteenth century to early- twentieth century, the bricks have a characteristically pale-yellow colour, due to the presence of vast amounts of chalk within the local landscape. Other brick colours are used, possibly coming from brickworks in Luton which produced grey and red bricks.

Red brick, more commonly used in other areas



Figure 82: Examples of brickwork within the Character Area

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of the county, is a small feature of the Character Area. Where it does feature, red bricked historic buildings, such as the Methodist Chapel and The Fox PH, are focal points within the village due to their contrasting appearance.

Davis Crescent, a new addition to the Conservation Area, is constructed in common Fletton Brick [Figure 83]. These bricks are wire cut, meaning they have a different texture to the older bricks in the village which are hand pressed. Wire cut bricks are the dominant brick type on twentieth century buildings within the Character Area.

Windows and Doors

Timber sash windows would have been dominant within the Character Area when the nineteenth century dwellings were constructed; however, a variety of windows are now present throughout the Character Area. Casement windows are now the most common, often double-glazed uPVC replacements of sashes which have been removed [Figure 84]. The arrangement of panes on timber windows, where present, are in a variety of patterns, with each casement or sash divided into multiple panes with integral glazing bars.

Surface mounted glazing bars are not a prevailing feature of the Character Area, nor are surface mounted trickle vents. Where timber casement windows are in situ, they are flush and single glazed. Modern windows have been installed almost wholescale throughout the Conservation Area, with older timber windows generally only retained on listed buildings. Metal framed casements are not a feature of the Character Area, with twentieth century infill dwellings almost all featuring uPVC windows.

On brick buildings, windows are typically deeply recessed with stone or tile sills, arched lintels and picked out in contrasting brick or stone. On rendered dwellings, windows are smaller, with wooden sills and flat render detail or a pentice board around the window lintel.

The retention of original timber doors is more common, although some properties have been extended at the front to create a single storey porch addition. Most properties are entered via a door flush with the exterior wall, leading to an internal lobby or directly into the front room of the building.

Composite doors are, like uPVC windows, common. Doors within the Character Area are in a variety of styles, dependent upon the design of the property. Sidelights and fan lights are not a feature of the Character Area, although some doors are part glazed.



Figure 83: Houses on Davis Close, constructed in Fletton Brick



Figure 84: example of where uPVC windows mimic traditional window types



Figure 85: Timber Casements at The Fox PH

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Boundary Treatments

Boundary treatments are minimal, limited to hedgerow, picket fencing and tree cover throughout the Character Area. The set back of buildings, including the presence of grass verges on both High Street and Royal Oak Lane creates a sense of separation meaning high or solid boundary walls are not necessary for privacy.

Iron railings are uncommon, and where present, incidental to the street scene. This is due to their visual permeability and the lack of grand formal gates or entranceways forming part of the boundary they mark.

Hedgerows have been removed in places to facilitate off road parking. Although beneficial to the appearance of the Conservation Area by removing cars from the road, the loss of hedging diminishes the green appearance of the street scene.

Neutral Elements

Within the Character Area there are numerous twentieth-century infill buildings on the High Street and Royal Oak Lane which do not detract from, but do not add to, the overall appearance and special interest of the Conservation Area. This is due to the sympathetic massing and materials used on these buildings, which allow them to remain innocuous within the street scene.

The general appearance of the twentieth century buildings allows them to be easily read as modern additions, with these later additions to the village typically featuring larger windows and reddish-brown bricks, rather than the orange-y red or gault brick of nineteenth century dwellings.

Public Realm

Public realm is limited within the Character Area to streetlamps, traffic signs and general paraphernalia, such as utilities cabinets and litter bins.

Outside Cromwell Cottage [Figure 69], there is a Victorian post box and bench which, together with the bench next to the pond, provide an attractive focal point to the village.

Streetlamps, where present, are a variety of styles. As part of the Parish's Neighbourhood Plan, streetlamps were appraised, with swan necked lamps considered most favourable by residents.



Figure 86: Hedgerow on Royal Oak Lane



Figure 87: Neutral modern buildings on the High Street



Figure 88: Infill dweillings on Royal Oak Lane

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Views

The location of areas where key views within the Character Area can be gained are identified on the adjacent map. These include the view toward St Mary's church at the bottom of the High Street and along the High Street toward the village shop.



Figure 89: View 6, at the junction of the High Street and Shillington Road



Figure 91: View 2, looking south along Royal Oak Lane



Figure 90: View 3, looking south east along the High Street



Figure 92: View 7, Holwell Road

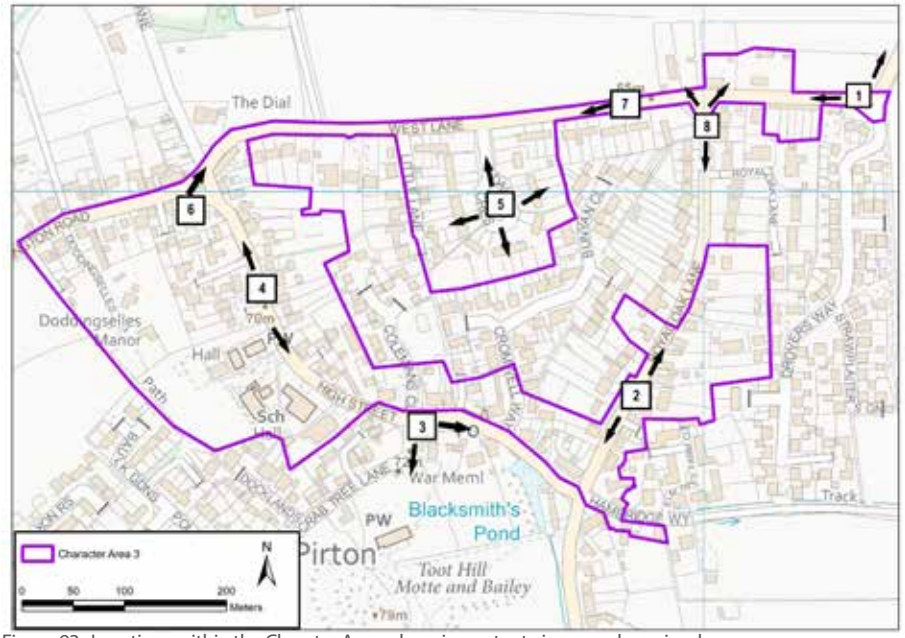

Figure 93: Locations within the Chracter Area where important views can be gained

Views toward the open countryside to the north reinforce Pirton's rural village character and provide a tangible connection to the Conservation Area's setting. Similarly, long views across the High Street and back towards Toot Hill are verdant in character, with the presence of hedgerows, trees and planting in gardens prominent within the streetscape.

The positioning of houses at junctions and in planned cul-de-sacs such as Davis Crescent, also add visual interest, intercepting and framing views towards the landscape beyond.

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3.6 The Setting of the Conservation Area

The setting of the Conservation Area is a contributor to its significance, allowing for the Conservation Area to be understood and appreciated. Setting is defined within the NPPF as:

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral. (NPPF: Annex 2: Glossary).

Pirton's setting remains as it has for centuries, surrounded by an agrarian landscape. Although nearby settlements such as Luton and Hitchin have expanded, their distance from the village means there has not been encroachment onto Pirton's setting.

There are numerous listed buildings and scheduled monuments outside the Conservation Area boundary which contribute to the understanding of how Pirton developed. These include Pirton Grange, a Grade II listed building north of the village and the scheduled monuments at Knocking Knoll and Pegsdon Hill. A non-designated structure which contributes to views within and outside the Conservation Area is the Water Tower on Prior's Hill, which has landmark value and is a prominent marker on the western side of the village, visible in long views to the Conservation Area's setting.

The Chilterns AONB makes an incredibly important contribution to the setting of the Conservation Area, adjoining its western boundary. The protected status of this area means tighter development controls are in place within the AONB and the prevailing natural beauty of the area both recognised and protected. Its designation also prevents further expansion



Figure 94: View toward the Chilterns AONB, from Priors Hill



Figure 95: View looking north out of the Conservation Area, from Burge End



Figure 96: The Water Tower on Prior's Hill

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of Luton northwards towards Pirton, with the AONB acting as an important landscape buffer to prevent encroachment upon the Conservation Area.

Luton Airport, some ten miles south of the Conservation Area, has some effect on the noise and tranquility of the Conservation Area but is sufficiently removed to not have a high impact upon the rural feel of the village. Further expansion of the airport, could however, alter this.

Further development of Pirton, either in immediate proximity to the Conservation Area, or some distance away, must be mindful of the Conservation Area's setting. Development which will alter entrances into the Conservation Area, for example, would change how it is understood and appreciated. Similarly, the construction of uncharacteristically tall buildings or a suburban block form on the edge of the village could detract from its character, appearance or overall aesthetic value.

Change will occur, and it is acknowledged that the setting of the Conservation Area has already been compromised in some areas, comparative to its appearance in other historical periods due to the construction of small estates both infilling sections of open land (such as Cromwell Way [Figure 98]) and at the village edge. However, there is the opportunity to both enhance and preserve the setting of the Conservation Area through good design and appropriate mitigation.



Figure 97: Modern housing on Priors Hill



Figure 98: Cromwell Way, a late twentieth century development, is accessed off the High Street

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4. Opportunities for Enhancement

The following key issues have been identified and are summarised below in brief. The list is in no way exhaustive and neither are the issues identified unique to Pirton Conservation Area, with many being shared with other conservation areas.

4.1 Access and Integration

Pirton can be accessed through multiple routes, on foot or by vehicle. In many places entry to the Conservation Area is not discernible and better acknowledgment of the Conservation Area, either through signage, changes in streetscape features or markers would be beneficial. Interpretation boards and the creation of integrated approach, utilising uniform signage and specific lighting and paving throughout the Conservation Area, or Character Areas, would allow for improved public awareness.

4.2 Car Parking

Car parking can have an adverse effect on the character of a conservation area, impacting the street scene and how the area is experienced. Pirton contains some areas where parking is particularly an issue and presents an opportunity for enhancement, to rid congestion and improve the appearance of the area. Particularly on the southern section of the High Street and Great Green, there is a shortage of off-road parking and parking is predominantly on-street, and thus does little for the appearance of the Conservation Area.

4.3 Inappropriate Modern Development

Throughout the Conservation Area are examples of inappropriate and unsympathetic additions which can make a cumulative negative impact on the area. The addition of uncharacteristic modern porches to residential units, the replacement of windows and doors, as well as the installation of unsympathetic additions to buildings such as air conditioning units, rooflights, extraction flues, and TV aerials and satellite dishes, harm the historic character and qualities of the area. In some cases, unsympathetic fixings can also affect the historic façade of buildings.



Figure 99: Car parking on Great Green



Figure 100: Visible satellite dishes and disproportionate modern windows distract from the appearance of buildings which otherwise contribute positively to the Conservation Area

Maintenance, and the lack of it, can detract from the quality of the Conservation Area. In general, Pirton is well maintained however the risk of decay is most common on private dwellings, and there is scope for better engagement with landowners to improve the appearance of properties. Regular maintenance, including painting, cleaning and the clearance of vegetation should be promoted as a key component of preserving the quality of the Conservation Area.

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4.4 Neutral Contributors

A significant proportion of buildings make a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. The dilution of positive buildings amongst those which are neutral leads to an underwhelming and in-distinctive overall character.

4.5 Public Realm

Street Furniture (Lampposts, benches, signage, bins, bike stands, bollards etc.)

Street furniture throughout the Conservation Area is generally of an acceptable quality, although in some places generic in appearance and requiring maintenance. Streetlights are not common on the outer fringes of the Conservation Area and predominantly present in the core of the village, however they are particularly inconsistent in design and would be enhanced through replacement with traditional and consistent streetlights which respect the historic character of the area.

Traditionally styled directional signs, with pointed ends [Figure 103], reinforce the village's character. Replication of these signs throughout the Conservation Area should be considered in order to enhance the sense of place and character.



Figure 101: Street lamp requiring repainting, Little Green



Figure 103: Traditionally styled directional signs are positive reinforcement of Pirton's rural character



Figure 102: Cluttered street furniture at Little Green

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Hard Landscaping

While road surfacing is generally of a good quality, there are some areas that would benefit from consistent maintenance, removing pot holes and areas of erosion. Pavements are of varying quality throughout the Conservation Area, featuring a range of coping stones and edge treatments. Granite edge stones, where present are a positive reinforcement of the village's character, utilising a traditional material, however in some places these have been lost. Reinstatement of granite and the prevention of further removal or replacement with cement stones, is recommended. Therefore, great consideration should be taken by the Local Planning Authority for all new applications.

Open Spaces

The open and green spaces in the Conservation Area make a positive contribution and are integral to its character in many instances, defining road junctions and passing places. The long-term maintenance needs of these spaces should be considered and, where appropriate, opportunities taken to enhance them and ensure access is maintained through roadside pathways and public rights of way..

Trees and Planting

Appropriate levels of maintenance need to be ensured and, where required, opportunities for enhancement sought to maintain and manage the trees within the Conservation Area. There are opportunities to enhance the verdant appearance of the Conservation Area along periphery roads, reinforcing areas of hedgerow which feature gaps.



Figure 104: Green space is an important part of the Conservation Area and its setting ; this view is taken from within the Toot Hill Scheduled Monument, looking out to the Chilterns AONB beyond

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5. Management Proposals

There are a wide range of issues facing the Pirton Conservation Area, many of which share common themes. This section seeks to recommend management proposals which could address these issues in both the short and long term.

The delivery of these management proposals provides the opportunity for partnership working with key organisations, the Parish Council, landowners and the local community and would be subject to available resources and funding arrangements.

5.1 Positive Management: Short term

The first set of proposals relate to positive management and focus on good practice and improved ways of working with the local planning authority. These are generally low cost and can be implemented within a short timeframe, typically within one to three years.

Enforcement

Where the necessary permission has not been sought for alterations, such as advertising signage and building alterations which are not contained within the General Permitted Development Order, the Local Planning Authority's powers of enforcement should be considered. This could assist in reinstating any lost character or architectural features whose loss may have a negative cumulative effect on the Conservation Area, as well as avoiding a precedence being set for similar, uncharacteristic works.

General Maintenance: Public Realm and Highways

Through the agreement of a standard good practice within the Conservation Area between relevant Local Authority teams and other landowners, long term goals can be set to promote good design within the public realm,



Figure 105: Example of a terrace where the replacement of windows diminishes the group value of the houses



Figure 106: Poorly matched, bright modern brick, can contrast poorly next to original buildings if not well considered

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such as avoiding excessive road markings or signage and agreeing a standard street furniture within Character Areas to ensure consistency over time as elements are introduced or replaced.

The existing swan necked lamps, where present, are a positive feature of the street scene and would benefit from a regular programme of maintenance. A survey of all lamps, noting their style and placement is recommended in order to inform a programme of renewal and repair.

Traffic signs within the Conservation Area would benefit from consolidation and re-assessment in places, as they add visual clutter to the street scene. Little Green, at the junction of the High Street, Walnut Tree Road and Royal Oak Lane [Figure 55], is an example of one area where signs have accumulated with little consideration of existing signage. Similarly, the range of bollards and posts used throughout the Conservation Area, whilst an important parking deterrent and preserver of grass verges, introduces a level of inconsistency and visual clutter which detract from the verdant quality of the Conservation Area.

Heritage Statements, Heritage Impact Assessments and Archaeological Assessments

In accordance with the NPPF (Para.194), applicants must describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

North Herts Council's requirements are as follows.

Heritage statements must be provided if the development effects a listed building.



Figure 107: Poorly proportioned modern outbuildings detract from the appreciation of their host dwellings



Figure 108: An example of where recently altered dwellings are prominent due to their incongruous height and material choice

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Design and Access statements need to be provided for:

- Major development
- One of more new houses within a conservation area
- Applications where floorspace created is more than 100m² and any part of the development is within a Conservation Area or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Applications within the Conservation Area and immediate setting require an appropriately detailed Heritage Statement.

The key views analysed within this document are in no way exhaustive. The impact of any addition, alteration or removal of buildings, structures, trees or highways on key views should be considered to aid decision making. This includes development outside the conservation area. Where appropriate, views must be considered within Design and Access or Heritage Statements. This should be in accordance with Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2017), which can be accessed here.

Local Heritage List

A Local List identifies buildings and structures of local architectural and/or historic interest, and these are considered to be 'non-designated heritage assets' under the provisions of the NPPF. Local Lists can be beneficial in ensuring the upkeep and maintenance of historic buildings that contribute to the character of the settlements. The exercise of creating a Register of Buildings of Local Interest would also facilitate a greater understanding of the area and could be utilised as a public engagement strategy to improve awareness and understanding.



Figure 109: Car parking strategies should consider where within the village there may be places for off road parking

Within this document, buildings of merit have been identified as non-designated heritage assets. within each Character Area. These identified buildings should form the basis of any local list, although a complete survey of the village, excluding buildings outside the Conservation Area, should be conducted.

Neutral Elements

The dilution of positive buildings amongst those which are neutral leads to an underwhelming and in-distinctive overall character.

North Herts Council must not allow for the quality of design to be 'averaged down' by the neutral and negative elements of the built environment. Officers must where possible seek schemes which enhance the built

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environment and look to conserve and reinstate historic features. It is also considered that poor-quality or unsympathetic schemes should not be allowed, both within the Conservation Area and its setting.

Care should be taken to ensure that unsympathetic additions do not have an impact on views along historic streets and the character of groups of historic buildings is preserved. For example, where buildings form a distinct terrace or pair, consideration should be given to all replacement windows, doors or paintwork, to ensure the homogeneity and design of the group is not undermined by one particular stand-out, incongruous property.

The introduction of an inappropriate colour palette and low-quality modern materials (cementitious render and roof tiles, or uPVC windows, for example) is also a concern within the Conservation Area, particularly in residential areas which are vulnerable to a diminishment of quality through the replacement of windows, doors and roof cladding. By using a palette or modern material which is out of keeping with the area, buildings can be visually domineering within a streetscape, and therefore have a negative impact upon the character of the area.

There are examples of extensions to existing buildings within the Conservation area which have failed to adequately reference the prevailing character, be that through an inappropriate massing, height or material palette of the extension. Within residential areas in particular, the agglomeration of structures through additional side developments between detached properties can have a detrimental impact to the historic grain of the village, and our appreciation of its development. Pirton is a historic settlement and has been subject to a considerable degree of infilling and building on larger gardens and backland sites. It is considered that further development in this way would most likely harm the character of the Conservation Area. The more substantial domestic properties within the outer section of the Conservation Area are



Figure 110: Ecological interpretation board, the pond, Pirton

enhanced by the setting provided by their reasonable and proportioned gardens. Side extensions which remove gaps between buildings can have a crowding, urbanising effect and should be resisted.

Great consideration should be given to building heights of all modern structures, especially if seen from areas of particular importance, such as The Bury. Buildings that are visible from important areas or from some distance should also seek to use materials which are typical of that building type within the village. For example, render and brick are used for dwellings, whereas timber boarding, was historically reserved only for agricultural or ancillary structures (cart lodges etc).

Modern outbuildings, where permitted, should also be appropriately scaled, to relate well to the host dwellings. In some cases, this may mean

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a traditional roof pitch cannot be achieved, and a slacker pitch with a lower ridge height, would be more appropriate. On garages and single storey buildings in particular, a traditional roof pitch can make the roof scape of the building incredibly dominant, and careful consideration should be given to any outbuilding which has attic space.

Backlands are important features of old town centres and villages, being part of the grain of the historic town plan and representing areas that had a service function in relation to the main street frontages. Those that survive in Pirton provide spaces useful for service areas and off-street parking. Similarly, the installation of unsympathetic and piecemeal boundary treatments can harm the immediate setting of historic buildings and spaces and the use of inappropriate railings, walls, and fences cause cumulative harm to the street scape and character of the area.

New Development

There are limited opportunities within Pirton Conservation Area and its setting for development which makes a positive contribution to the conservation area. This is due to the village's existing loose grain of development, which would be compromised by infill dwellings. Similarly, the creation of further development, such as cul-de-sacs or ribbon development, on the village fringes, would lessen its rural character and compromise how the surrounding landscape is experienced within the Conservation Area. To be successful, any future development needs to be mindful of the local character of Pirton Conservation Area, while at the same time addressing contemporary issues such as sustainability.

Pirton Neighbourhood Plan provides details and recommendations for new development. As part of this appraisal of the Conservation Area, the following recommendations are made.

Successful new development will:

- Relate to the geography and history of the place and the lie of the land,
- Sit happily in the pattern of existing development and routes through and around it (including public footpaths)
- Respect important views,
- Respect the scale of neighbouring buildings,
- Use materials and building methods which as high in quality of those used in existing buildings, and
- Create new views and juxtapositions which add to the variety and texture of their setting.

North Herts Council should guide development in a positive manner by:

- Engaging with developers at an early stage through the Pre-Application Process to ensure modern development is high quality in design, detail and materials.
- Ensuring medium-large scale development schemes are referred to a CABE Design Review (or similar) to ensure that new buildings, additions and alterations are designed to be in sympathy with the established character of the area. The choice of materials and the detailed design of building features are important in making sure it's appropriate to a conservation area.
- Seeking opportunities for developers to make a positive contribution to the wider historic environment through Section 106 Agreements.

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Public Resources

The preservation and enhancement of private properties can be improved through the publishing of resources aimed to inform property owners and members of the public. An introductory summary of the Conservation Area Appraisal in the form of a leaflet or factsheet(s) is a simple way to communicate the significance of the area and ensure members of the public are aware of the implications of owning a property within a conservation area. In addition, a maintenance guide would assist property owners in caring for their property in an appropriate manner. A revised Good Practice Design Guide on standard alterations such as signage, shopfronts or advertisements, windows, doors, rainwater goods, boundaries and roof extensions will ensure inappropriate development does not continue to be the accepted norm.

- Provide guidance on appropriate design and materials for windows and doors and encouraging the retention or reinstatement of historic glazing patterns and door designs and the use of appropriate materials.

- Provide guidance on the traditional form of boundary treatments and encourage their reinstatement where they have been removed or compromised.

- Provide guidance on traditional roofing materials and encouraging the reinstatement of good quality slate and the removal of unsympathetic modern materials such as interlocking concrete tiles.

- Provide and update guidance relating to signage. This should address appropriate size and design, the extent and amount and associated lighting. All further planning applications and advert consent applications should be required to comply, where possible, with this standard, designed to help to restore the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Poor maintenance leads to the deterioration of the fabric of the built environment and results in a loss of architectural details. Improved awareness of simple maintenance and repair would be conducive with the preservation of Pirton's built heritage. At present there is a range of interpretation (information boards, signage, webpages) within the Conservation Area and relating to the Conservation Area, aimed at improving understanding and awareness. These must continue to be maintained and updated where appropriate to ensure awareness and reinforce the identity of Pirton as a historic settlement.

Tree Management

In line with the Town and Country Planning Act, all trees in Conservation Areas are afforded the same protection as a Tree Preservation Order. Trees which have a trunk diameter of more than 75mm, at a height of 1.5m from the ground, may not be felled or lopped unless six weeks written notice has been given to the Council. Six weeks notice has to be given to the council under S211 of the Act.

It is also considered that any prominent trees, street trees, and trees with amenity value on private land throughout the Conservation Area should be monitored and maintained appropriately. Any tree that makes a positive contribution to the area should be retained, maintained and, if felled (only if dead, dying or dangerous) replaced with an appropriate new tree.

Twentieth-Century Buildings

There are some twentieth-century buildings which make a neutral or negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area. There is scope to enhance these sites and buildings through a considered design

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approach which can guide future improvements. Should opportunities for redevelopment arise in the future, high quality design should be pursued and encouraged through design guidance.

5.2 Positive Management: Longer Term

The second set of proposals are also focussed on positive management but either take longer to implement or are better suited to a longer time frame.

Access and Integration

The Conservation Area is easily accessed by bus, foot and vehicle. Further promotion of the village's footpaths, bolstering work already conducted by Pirton Parish Council would allow for a renewed level of engagement between visitors and residents to the village.

Toot Hill/The Bury scheduled monument is an integral part of the village's history yet lacks opportunities for engagement. The introduction of interpretation boards within the monument, explaining the earthworks and highlighting their importance should be considered. Careful consideration must, nevertheless, be given to where these are placed and what information they give. The security of the archaeological remains should not be compromised through the introduction of such elements.

Car Parking

This should begin with a car parking survey to establish the need for car parking. Once the level of necessary car parking has been established a landscape strategy should be created by North Herts District Council in conjunction with local stakeholders.

Additional hard landscaping could have a particularly harmful impact on the character of the Conservation Area, adding an urban quality at odds with Pirton's overall character. Where areas of private front gardens have been paved over, this is often in a piecemeal approach and inconsistent with neighbouring properties and adjoining paving. Parameters should be set for all such changes in the Conservation Area as part of an up to date design guide, reinforced by an agreed assessment of planning applications by the Local Planning Authority. Planning applications for additional hardstanding which removes sections of hedgerow should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances, with great care and consideration given to all new materials such as paving. Consideration of an Article 4 direction which limits permitted development rights in relation to driveways should also be considered if the issue of hardstanding becomes more pressing

Character Appraisal and Management Plan

The Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan should be reviewed from time to time to monitor change and inform management proposals.

Conservation Area Boundary

The Conservation Area boundary has been revised within this appraisal in accordance with the NPPF (2019) and Historic England Advice Note 1: Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management (2018). The boundary is proposed to excludes areas which are deemed to not reflect the historic and architectural qualities for which the Conservation Area was designated and includes sections of housing from the later nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth century which are indicative of the period in which they were built, offering an understanding of the village's development in its more recent history. The boundary should continue to be assessed as part of future reviews of the Management Plan to ensure

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it is robust and adequately protects the significance of the area.

Interpretation: Improved Understanding and Awareness

At present there are scattered examples of interpretation boards and signs within the Conservation Area aimed at improving understanding and awareness. These are primarily ecology based and offer little about the history of the Conservation Area or wider village. Updating, upkeeping and enlarging their reach would be an effective way to improve the awareness of Pirton Conservation Area's significance.

The creation of an advertised, easily accessible heritage trail, unification of signage across the Conservation Area and introduction of additional interpretation boards would be beneficial., particularly in aiding understanding of the village's scheduled monuments.

Opportunity Sites

There are some opportunity sites across the Conservation Area which, if sensitively redeveloped, may enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Sites which may provide opportunity for enhancement include those where premises or buildings are empty, back land areas or corner plots.

Wrights Farm, in the northern section of the Conservation Area, would benefit from some form of sensitive redevelopment which allows for the reuse of the listed barn. A masterplan for the site would be highly beneficial, which should be informed by a heritage statement which considers the significance of the barn, remaining structures and their setting.

The Council should consider utilising existing powers to intervene where any building has been vacant for over six months so that it does not detract from the area's character and appearance. Small grant funding schemes would also provide an incentive to encourage private property owners to carry out works to enhance their property and thereby the wider Conservation Area.

Public Realm

The first opportunity to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area is through investment to improve the wider public realm. This can be achieved through continuing to improve and rationalise existing street furniture.

Consistent maintenance of areas of public space, through weeding, planting, the renewal or introduction of additional benches and the maintenance of existing features through the creation of an integrated management plan, combined with developer, landowners and the local authority would be of benefit.

5.3 Sustainability and Green Infrastructure

The impacts of climate change are having a notable affect on the environment, both built and natural. North Herts Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019, with a Climate Change Strategy published shortly after. This strategy was reviewed in 2022 and has three priorities: Taking Action, Enabling Carbon Savings and Inspiring the Community.

The key objectives outlined within North Herts Council's Climate Change Strategy are:

- achieve Carbon Neutrality for the Council's own operations by

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2030

- ensure all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change
- achieve a Net Zero Carbon district by 2040
- become a district that is resilient to unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Full details of the Council's pledge are available on their website:

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/climate-change

As part of the strategy, the council seek to promote ways in which the public can reduce their carbon footprint. This can be achieved in many ways, from tackling waste to retrofitting homes in order to make them more energy efficient. These are summarised below.

Further information on what individuals can do to help combat climate change is also available on Hertfordshire County Council's website:

https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/sustainable-hertfordshire/sustainable-hertfordshire.aspx#whatyoucando

In terms of Pirton Conservation Area, there are limitations on the retrofitting works which can take place without planning permission and without affecting the special interest of the Conservation Area. Alterations to a listed building will almost certainly require listed building consent, and the council should be consulted on any proposals to retrofit or upgrade a listed building in order to make it more energy efficient, as it is highly likely that such changes will affect the special interest of the heritage asset.

In all cases, a 'whole building approach' should be employed to understand how homes can be made more energy efficient. This involves a staged approach of assessing the building's issues, setting objectives as how to address these issues, detailed design, installation, evaluation and maintenance.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution for improving energy efficiency and it is also important to understand that some historic buildings may not meet expectations or be suitable for retrofit. Prioritising key expectations is a crucial part of the whole building approach and should be outlined at the very beginning.

Understanding how you use a building is a crucial, as many historic properties were not built for modern aspects such as central heating or ensuite bathrooms, which can create damp and ventilation issues. Not all homes require standard or one off items to be made energy efficient; installing double glazing, for example, will be an inefficient and costly exercise if the house is also losing considerable amounts of heat through its roof or walls.

Simple and low-cost solutions such as adding loft insulation, draught proofing the building and using thick curtains can have a notable effect on energy efficiency. Basic maintenance also has an impact on energy usage, as poorly maintained buildings can quickly become damp due to defective gutters or drains.

Larger alterations, such as alternate energy sources and external modifications should be considered carefully and only once an assessment of the whole building has been conducted. In many instances planning permission may also be required.

For all non-designated buildings within the Pirton Conservation Area:

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- Planning permission must be granted for the addition of new external cladding in stone, artificial stone, pebble dash, render, timber or tiles. The addition of external insulation is regularly cited as a quick way to improve the energy efficiency of a home, however this must be done with due consideration of planning policies and the special interest of Pirton Conservation Area. Only planning applications which propose sympathetic alterations will be supported by the local authority. As an example, this would include applications for external alterations which retain existing architectural features of the building which contribute positively to the Conservation Area, and those which utilise materials identified within this document as an important feature of the village.

- Alternative energy sources, such as air, heat or ground source pumps, only require planning permission if they would require the addition of the air pump, or a flue, to a wall or roof which fronts a highway. There are specific permitted development rights for each type of alternative energy source, so please contact the council's planning team with any questions.

- Solar panels require planning permission if they are to be affixed to the wall of a non-designated building which fronts a highway within a Conservation Area, or if they are ground mounted and would be in front of the building line.

More guidance on energy efficiency in historic buildings has been published by Historic England and is free to download on their website:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/retrofit-and-energy-efficiency-in-historic-buildings/

Recycling and Waste

As part of their Climate Change Strategy, North Herts Council have set an objective to run food waste awareness programmes and recruit a Waste Awareness Officer, whom will be shared with East Herts Council. The council seek to ensure that recycling and waste collections promote reuse and the reduction of waste, and a looking at low carbon options for their next waste contract which will commence in 2025.

Alternate Transport Modes

Residents of the district are encouraged to make alternative travel arrangements to using a private car where possible, in order to reduce their carbon footprint. Due to Pirton's location, it is appreciated that there is a reliance on the car for many residents, however improvements to the cycle network within North Herts form part of the council's Climate Change Strategy.

The introduction of electric vehicle charging points to domestic properties within the Conservation Area will be supported if they are suitably placed and designed. Where possible, they should be placed to the side of properties or in a concealed location, and not require extensive vehicle hardstanding. The loss of more than 50% of a garden area is not advised, as this would result in a reduction in the Conseration Area's green character.

There are few public areas suitable for the addition of electric vehicle charging points within Pirton Conservation Area, due to the general lack of public parking provision. Should public charging points be required, an assessment of possible areas should be conducted then put out to public consultation.

5.4 Funding Opportunities

There are three main funding opportunities which would assist in the

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execution of these plans:

National Heritage Lottery Fund

The National Heritage Lottery Fund is the single largest dedicated funder of heritage in the UK and therefore is the most obvious potential source

of funding. Funding is often targeted at schemes which preserve, enhance and better reveal the special interest of the area whilst also improving public awareness and understanding. Grant opportunities and requirements change overtime, for up-to-date information on NHLF schemes North Herts Council should consult their appointed Heritage Specialist.

Section 106 Agreements

Planning obligations, also known as Section 106 agreements, can be used by the local authority to ensure any future development has a positive impact upon the Conservation Area. These agreements could be used to fund public realm or site-specific improvements.

Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas (Historic England)

Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas is a programme run by Historic England to target funding for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. As the name suggests, the scheme forms partnerships with local authorities (along with any additional funding partners) to facilitate the regeneration of an area through the conservation of its built heritage. The scheme makes funds available to individuals to enable them to carry out repairs or improvement works to their property to enhance the area. This would be suitable to preserve and enhance the architectural detailing throughout the Conservation Area.

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6. Appendices

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6.2 List of Designated Heritage Assets within the Conservation Area

List Entry Number	Address	Grade
1347109	Crabtree House	II
1103187	Ivy Cottage	II
1308350	Elm Tree Farmhouse	II
1175488	Pirton Methodist Church	II
1103193	20, High Street	II
1347112	Orchard Cottage	II
1175517	14, Royal Oak Lane	II*
1295388	Farm Building at Entrance to Yard at Hammond's Farm	II
1308247	23-25, Walnut Tree Road	II
1103184	North Barn at Hammond's Farm	II
1347095	Lavender Cottage	II
1175626	Farmbuildings Fronting Road at Walnut Tree Farm	II
1103190	South-East Barn at No 1 (Elm Tree Farm)	II
1250685	Farm Building to The North West of Burge End Farmhouse	II
1347107	Outhouse 10 Metres to North of House at Hammond's Farm	II
1103162	South-East Barn at Walnut Tree Farm	II*

List Entry Number	Address	Grade
1295337	5, Crabtree Lane	II
1103191	31, High Street	I
1347110	Church Of St Mary (C Of E)	II
1175262	Burge End Farmhouse	II
1103188	The Cottage Tudor Cottage	II
1430264	Pirton War Memorial	II
1175526	Barn At Number 28	II
1103194	19-21, Royal Oak Lane	II
1103159	Dovecote, Stable and Granary at Rectory Farm	II
1175469	17, High Street	II
1103189	16, Great Green	II
1175478	The Fox Inn	II
1295369	Elm Cottage	II
1308280	Cartshed Next Entrance to Forecourt at Rectory Farmhouse	II
1175604	7, Walnut Tree Road	II
1103186	4-6, Bury End	II
1347076	41-45, High Street	II
1103157	28, Shillington Road	II

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List Entry Number	Address	Grade
1295393	7-13, Bury End	II
1295356	8, Great Green	II
1347094	South Barn and Adjoining Stable at Rectory Farm	II
1347077	Primrose Cottage	II*
1103158	The Rectory Farmhouse	II
1466237	Barn At Wright's Farm	II*
1175545	West Barn at Rectory Farm	II*
1175235	Hammond's Farmhouse	II
1347108	Ashburn	II
1308341	14, Great Green	II
1175493	Docwra Manor	II
1347097	4-6, Walnut Tree Road	II
1103161	Walnut Tree Farmhouse	II
1103192	Cromwell Cottage	II
1347111	Sawford Cottage	II
1295373	1 And 3, Crabtree Lane	N/A
1012325	Toot Hill Motte and Bailey Castle and Shrunken Medieval Village at Pirton	N/A
1434415	Anglo-Saxon Settlement, And Probable Prehistoric Ring Ditches, West of Pirton Village	N/A
1009451	Moated Site and Associated Enclosure at Rectory Farm	N/A

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6.3 Legislation and Policy

LEGISLATION/POLICY/GUIDANCE	DOCUMENT	SECTION/POLICY
Primary Legislation	Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990	66: General duty as respects listed buildings in exercise of planning functions. 72: General duty as respects conservation areas in exercise of planning functions.
National Planning Policy	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. National Planning Policy Framework. London: UK Government, 2021.	Section 16, Conserving and enhancing the historic environment; Annex 2.
National Guidance	Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government. *National Planning Practice Guidance.* London: UK Government, 2014.	ID: Section 18a.

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LEGISLATION/POLICY/GUIDANCE	DOCUMENT	SECTION/POLICY
National Guidance	Historic England, *Conservation Area Appraisal, Designation and Management Historic England Advice Note 1*. Second Edition. Swindon: Historic England, 2019.	
National Guidance	Historic England, The Setting of Heritage Assets *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3*. Second Edition. Swindon: Historic England, 2017.	
Local Supplementary Planning Document	North Herts Local Plan 2011-2031, Adopted 2023.	Policy SP13: Historic Environment.
Local Supplementary Planning Document	Pirton Parish Council, *Pirton Neighbourhood Plan*, 2018.	PNP2 - Design and Character; PNP3 - Residential Extensions; PNP4 - Hedgerows, Trees and Verges; PNP6 - Local Green Spaces; PNP7 - Key Views and Vistas; PNP8 - Heritage Assets and Archaeological Heritage; PNP13 - Car Parking

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LEGISLATION/POLICY/GUIDANCE	DOCUMENT	SECTION/POLICY
Local Supplementary Planning Document	Wood and North Herts District Council, *Pirton Conservation Area Character Statement*, 2019.	

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6.4 Glossary

Bargeboard - A board fastened to the projecting gables of a roof.

Bay window - Window of one or more storeys projecting from the face of a building.

Capital - The topmost member of a column (or pilaster).

Casement window - Window hung vertically, hinged one side, so that it swings inward or outward.

Coping - The capping or covering of a wall.

Cornice - Upper section of an entablature, a projecting shelf along the top of a wall often supported by brackets or corbels.

Cross-wing - Wing attached to a main or original house block, its axis at right angles to the original block, and often gabled.

Domesday Book – survey conducted in 1086 following the Norman Conquest, detailing towns and parishes within England.

Dormer - A structural element protruding from the plane of a sloping roof surface. Dormers are used to create usable space in the roof by adding headroom and usually also by enabling addition of windows.

Façade - An exterior side of a building, usually the front.

Gable - A triangular portion of an end wall between the edges of a sloping roof.

Henge Monument - A prehistoric circular or oval earthen enclosure, dating from around 3000 BC to 2000 BC.

Hip roof - A type of roof where all sides slope downwards from the ridge to the eaves.

Holloway – lane or road, marked in the ground by raised banks either side

Jettying - A building technique used in medieval timber frame buildings in which an upper floor projects beyond the dimensions of the floor below.

Parapet - A low wall built up above the level of a roof, to hide the roof or to provide protection against falling.

Sash - The horizontal and vertical frame that encloses the glazing of a window. A sash may be fixed or operable and may be of several different types depending on operation.

Sherd – a shard or piece of pottery

Univallate Hillfort - A defended enclosure common in the later Bronze Age and Iron Age of northwest Europe, bounded by a single line of ramparts, often with strengthened defences around the entrance.

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6.5 Links

All hyperlinks included within the text of this document are reproduced in full below.

Historic England's Guidance on conservation area designation:

https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/conservation-area-appraisal-designation-management-advice-note-1/

Details on Historic England's At Risk register:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/

North Herts Council's Consrvation Areas:

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/conservation-areas

North Herts Council's Planning Team:

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning

North Herts' Statement on Climate Change:

https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/climate-change

Historic England's guide to tree preservation orders:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/consents/tree

Historic England's guide to Article 4 directions:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/historic-environment/article4directions

Historic England's Guide to conservation areas (webpage):

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/hpg/has/conservation-areas/

Historic England's Guide to Retrofitting Properties:

https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/retrofit-and-energy-efficiency-in-historic-buildings/

Hertfordshire County Council's Guide to Climate Change:

https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/sustainable-hertfordshire/sustainable-hertfordshire.aspx#whatyoucando

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CABINET
27 JUNE 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2022-23 (QUARTER 4 UPDATE)

REPORT OF: REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FIANANCE AND IT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST, SUSTAINABILITY, A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents progress on delivering the Council Delivery Plan for 22-23 at the end of Quarter 4, which includes:

- Progress against the completion of Council projects and milestones
- Requests to change milestone dates
- New milestones
- Commentary on progress made and any new issues, risks, or opportunities

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- That Cabinet notes the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including new milestones, deleted milestones, and changes to milestone dates and risks.
- That Cabinet notes the deletion of projects outlined in 8.6, to be replaced by new projects in 2023-24.
- That Cabinet note the completion of the Museum and HTH recovery, Customer Portal, Full review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and Green Space Management Strategy Projects.
- That Cabinet notes the reduction in the Town Centre Recovery risk score from a 3 to a risk score of 2.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. In developing the CDP, it was agreed that Cabinet would receive quarterly updates. The updates are also provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committee so that they can provide additional oversight and support to Cabinet.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Service Directors and Service Managers have provided updates on progress and will have made Executive Members (and Deputies) aware of progress made.

5.2. A draft of the Quarter 4 update was provided to Performance and Risk Management Group (PRMG) in May. The Group has a standing invite to the Executive Member for Finance and IT (has responsibility for performance monitoring), the Deputy Executive Member for Finance and IT, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) and the Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FAR). Other members of O&S and FAR are also encouraged to attend when they can. PRMG were asked to comment on the content and format of the CDP Q4 update.

5.3. The CDP is reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and they are asked to provide comments and recommendations to Cabinet.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision first notified on the Forward Plan on the 21 April 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The CDP brings together projects, risks, and performance indicators together in one document. It was adopted by Cabinet in March 2022, which included the projects to be included within the CDP.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Appendix A provides an update on the progress made in delivering the Council Plan 2022-23. Whilst it is labelled as a Quarter 4 update, it generally reflects the latest position at the time that the report was written.

8.2 The intention is that the CDP reports provide an overview, as providing all the details on project milestones would lead to a report that was too long. Requests can be made (especially by O&S) to look at individual projects in more detail. Any such request would be incorporated into the next monitoring report. The progress made to date against each project and resulting impacts on future milestones, is detailed in the commentary against each project in Appendix A. Future updates will provide monitoring against any revised milestones.

8.3 **New Project milestones within the CDP**

The Council Delivery Plan is now a live document with changes to milestones recorded and approved by Cabinet. For projects which are to continue through to the 23-24

Council Delivery Plan, new milestones with due dates in 23-24 have been added to the latest monitoring report in Appendix A for information. These new milestones have been highlighted in grey.

8.4 **Proposed changes/ deletions to milestones this quarter**

As projects progress, it is sometimes necessary to amend the milestone due dates, or delete any milestones which have been superseded by new ones. Any changes must be approved by Cabinet. For Q4, there are proposals to make changes/ deletions to the following projects, with reasons detailed in Appendix A. These proposed changes have been highlighted in yellow.

- Town Centre Recovery
- Resident / Public EV Charging in our Car parks
- Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal
- Town Centre Strategies
- Royston Town Hall Annexe
- Masterplanning
- Charnwood House
- Museum Storage
- Local Government Boundary Review, and
- Churchgate

8.5 **Completed projects this quarter.**

For Q4, the following projects, all the relevant milestones have been completed and the projects will no longer appear on the quarterly monitoring reports.

- North Herts Museum and Hitchin Town Hall Recovery
- Customer Portal
- Full review of Council Tax reduction scheme.
- Green Space Management Strategy

8.6 **Projects to be deleted and replaced with new projects in 23-24**

As we complete the project monitoring for the 22-23 year and move into the monitoring of the 23-24 Council Delivery Plan, some projects will no longer be reported on in their current form.

- Local Plan – replaced by “Local Plan Delivery/ Review”
- Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategy – to be combined into a new project for an Enterprise Strategy
- Work with Stakeholders to Increase Accommodation for Single Homeless People – new action for 23-24 to work with stakeholders to help all homeless people.
- Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy – to be replaced in 23-24 by new projects “Waste and Street Cleansing Procurement” and “Waste Depot.”

8.7 Performance Indicators

For Q4, there are 6 Green performance indicators, 2 Red and 1 showing as amber. One further indicator is for information only, with no target set against it.

8.8 **Risks**

For Q4, the Town Centre Recovery Risk, was reduced from a 3 to a 2, following a reassessment of the original risk score. The change reflects that to reach the target score, the mitigations aim to reduce the likelihood rather than the impact.

15 risk scores remain unchanged and 15 projects have already reached their target risk scores, through implementation of mitigating actions.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The constitution determines the role of Cabinet as including: "To take decisions on resources and priorities, together with other stakeholders and partners in the local community, to deliver and implement the budget and policies decided by the Full Council. To monitor performance and risk in respect of the delivery of those policies and priorities" (paragraph 5.6.3).

9.2 The constitution determines the role of Overview and Scrutiny as including: "To review performance against the Council's agreed objectives/ priorities and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/ or service area. To consider risks to the achievement of those objectives/ priorities. To make recommendations to Cabinet" (paragraph 6.2.7 (s)).

9.3 There are no specific legal implications arising from the CDP. However, there may be individual legal implications for some of the projects outlined. Any commissioning of work on new and existing projects will follow the standard legal requirements and those required by the Council's internal standing orders, contained within the Constitution.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Where projects are linked to efficiencies or investments then these are included in the budget proposals and monitored through the quarterly finance reports.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The Council Delivery Plan aims to support the risk management process by directly linking the risks to projects being undertaken. The aim of these proposals is to strengthen the link between performance and risk and make risks more current. This should provide an improved perspective of the risks that the Council faces.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 Performance reporting provides a means to monitor whether the Council is meeting the stated outcomes of the district priorities, its targets or delivering accessible and appropriated services to the Community to meet different people's needs.

12.3 As projects progress, Equality Implications will be considered, and Equality Impact Assessments conducted where relevant.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There will continue to be a need to align Council and Service objectives with available people resources to be able to achieve them. The Council Delivery Plan will help to make that link clearer.

15. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report. However, a number of the projects to be monitored throughout the year are related to key environmental issues.

15.2 As projects progress, Environmental Implications will be considered, and Environmental Impact Assessments conducted where relevant.

16. APPENDICES

Appendix A – Council Delivery Plan 22-23 Q4 monitoring report

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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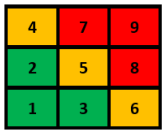
18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

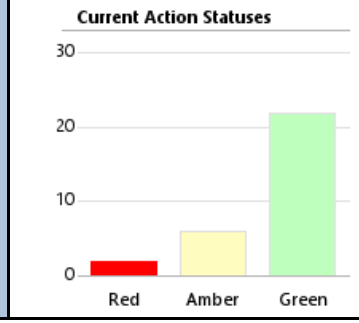
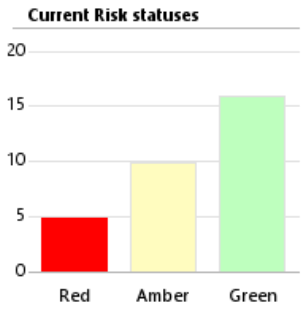
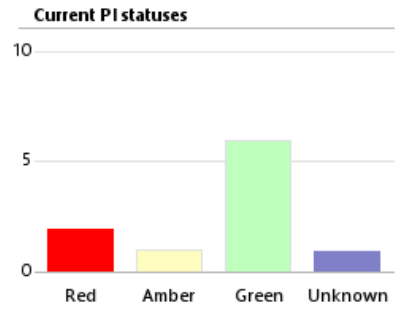
Council Delivery Plan – Status Key

Status	Description
Projects	
	The project (and all recorded milestones) has been completed.
	All ongoing milestones have not reached their due dates (or do not have due dates).
	There is at least one ongoing milestone that has not been completed by the due date, but the overall project due date has not passed. Proposals to change milestone due dates will be made, which may also lead to a proposed change to the overall project due date.
	Overall project due date has passed and there is at least one milestone that has not been completed. Proposals to change project due date and milestone due dates will be made.
	The progress bar is based on the number of completed milestones compared with the total number of milestones e.g., two completed out of a total of six would be 33%. Therefore, 0% reflects that no milestones have been completed yet, rather than there has been no progress at all.
Risks	
	Assessed as a low risk.
	Assessed as a medium risk.
	Assessed as a high risk.
PIs	
	Data value has met or exceeded the target figure.
	Data value has not achieved the target figure, but it is within the agreed tolerance range.
	Data value has not achieved the target figure and it is outside the agreed tolerance range.
	Pentana cannot calculate a status, as officers have not entered a target figure for the period on to the system.
	Data value has improved compared with the same time last year.
	Data value has deteriorated compared with the same time last year.
	Data value has not changed compared with the same time last year.
	Pentana cannot calculate a direction of travel, as previous data is not available for comparison.



Council Delivery Plan 2022/23

Generated on: 09 May 2023

Projects Summary	Risks Summary	PIs Summary
		

	Museum/HTH Recovery	**Progress**	100%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	To rebuild museum visitor numbers, Town Hall usage and income.				
Latest Update	25-Apr-2023 Throughout 2022/23, North Herts Museum made a strong recovery in terms of visitor numbers, with usage now comparable to pre-pandemic levels. This success story is mirrored by Hitchin Town Hall performance, with income levels exceeding full year pre-pandemic levels. Staffing issues at the cafe and with operating bars will continue to be addressed and managed. In view of performance levels achieved, all milestones for the year have been successfully completed. Ongoing operation of the facilities doesn't meet the definition of a project and is a business-as-usual activity. Therefore, further milestones are not considered appropriate for subsequent years. Performance will continue to be reported via related performance indicators, which will be included in future monitoring reports. Associated risk level still assessed as low, although the ongoing 'cost of living' crisis could reduce the level of demand for events to be held at HTH.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
To rebuild visitor numbers at the museum to pre-pandemic levels.	01-Jul-2022	Yes	Completed - Initial milestone due date related to the completion of activities in the first quarter of 2022/23 to provide impetus to the visitor numbers recovery process.
To rebuild interest in hiring Hitchin Town Hall back to pre- pandemic levels.	01-Aug-2022	Yes	Completed - Initial milestone due date related to the completion of activities in the first part of 2022/23 to provide impetus to the rebuilding of hiring interest.
To rebuild overall income levels at the facility to pre-pandemic levels.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Completed.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Booking of Hitchin Town Hall and income levels may be impacted by the rising cost of living and the reduced levels of disposable		5	3	3	Museum visitor numbers			30,012	37,500

income. 2. Lack of interest in the facilities following the extended period of closure and restrictions linked to the Covid pandemic. 3. Inability to generate income as well as hoped and to the levels targeted.									

	Tourism Strategy				**Progress**	0%		**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	To develop a draft strategy by March 2023.								
Latest Update	03-May-2023 Project superseded. Development of a Tourism 'work stream' is now being progressed via an overarching Enterprise Strategy, incorporating Commercial, Economic Development and Tourism. Progress towards developing and adopting this Enterprise Strategy will be monitored via a new Council Delivery Plan project for 2023/24. Currently expect the new Strategy to be adopted by Cabinet in September 2023.								
Milestone				**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**			
Delete previously recorded milestone - Appoint consultants.				31-Jan-2023	No	Superseded by the new 'Enterprise Strategy' Council Delivery Plan project for 2023/24.			
Delete previously recorded milestone - Review and approve draft strategy.				31-Mar-2023	No	Superseded by the new 'Enterprise Strategy' Council Delivery Plan project for 2023/24.			
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**		**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Risk of delay in procuring consultants and subsequent delay to production of strategy.		1	1	1						

	Business Recovery: Grants				**Progress**	100%		**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	Promotion of business grants and payment. Completion of required Government reconciliations.								
Latest Update	11-Jan-2023 NHC has completed all returns requested by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy relating to the reconciliation processes. Therefore, all NHC actions completed, although BEIS will be in contact should they require anything further from us as they assess the evidence provided.								
Milestone				**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**			
Continued promotion of available business support grants and business rate reliefs.				30-Apr-2022	Yes	Grants ceased 31 March 2022. All processed and paid within stipulated timeframes.			
Complete all Government returns for reconciliation processes.				31-Mar-2023	Yes	Completed.			
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**		**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**

1. Lack of resources available to deliver grant schemes.		1	1	1					

	**Town Centre Recovery**				**Progress**	33%		**Due Date**	31-Jul-2023
Project Summary	Completion of economic recovery strategies for four towns. Development of permit scheme for experimental Traffic Regulation Orders.								
Latest Update	26-Apr-2023 Recovery plans for the four towns now agreed by the Executive Members for Enterprise and Planning. New milestones to be introduced for 2023/24 to reflect key activities we are taking to enable stakeholders to progress delivery of the plans. The studies will inform preparation of an overarching Town Centre Strategy and associated masterplans for each town. Experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (ETRO) for Hitchin and Royston are still both expected to be made permanent by the end of the trial periods (July 2023), with Project Boards providing oversight. Both related milestones are therefore aligned with this timeframe. Risk level remains low, although this is dependent on successfully taking forward plans and delivering identified improvements to our town centres.								

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Completion of Welcome Back Fund town centre recovery plans for the four towns.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Plans finalised and signed-off by the Executive Members for Enterprise and Planning.
Development of permit scheme for experimental traffic orders, sub-delegate to appropriate body, enforcement to be with NHC.	31-Mar-2023	No	Propose to change milestone due date to 31 July 2023 to align with the other ETRO milestone. This milestone relates to Hitchin only.
Liaise with HCC and other key stakeholders with regard the experimental traffic orders for town centres.	31-Jul-2023	No	Aligns with the trial period end date. Milestone relates to ETROs in Hitchin and Royston only.

Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Resourcing the project – limited budget available. 2. Town Strategy not yet in place. 3. Reputational damage if initiatives are not progressed or delayed.		3	2	1					

	**Health Inequalities**				**Progress**	42%		**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	To secure funding for projects (targeting HCC Public Health) to address health inequalities. Then develop actions based on funding available and terms attached.								
Latest Update	21-Apr-2023 The three projects included in the approved intervention plan commenced by the end of March 2023. These projects, funded by HCC funding, are Royston Men's Club, Royston Emotional Wellbeing and Letchworth Horticultural Therapy. The projects will be delivered throughout 2023/24 as per the milestones below. In addition, projects funded from other sources will also commence and be delivered, including Letchworth Men's Club (Active Local funding) and Seated Exercise Letchworth (Live Longer Better funding). North Herts Healthy Hub continues to provide support services to residents and the Wellbeing Partnership for the district continues to be a vehicle for determining local wellbeing priorities and needs alongside our partners. The risk level associated with delivering projects throughout 2023/24 is low as the required infrastructure/funding is in place. However, for subsequent years, there is a risk that the provision of support to residents will reduce if sufficient further funding is not obtained or sufficient budget is not allocated to maintain current provision.								

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Secure Tranche 1 funding (Health and Wellbeing led projects).	31-May-2022	Yes	Completed.

Develop an action plan for Tranche 1 (based on Public Health Strategy, Health Inequalities Framework and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment).			31-Dec-2022	Yes	Health inequalities identified and agreed. Developed associated intervention plan. HCC approved plan on 14 December 2022.				
Deliver Tranche 1 projects (as planned for 2022/23).			31-Mar-2023	Yes	The three projects included in the intervention plan all commenced by 31 March 2023, meeting funding requirements. Delivery to continue throughout 2023/24.				
New milestone - Royston Men's Club - June 2023 course.			30-Jun-2023	No					
New milestone - Royston Men's Club - September 2023 course.			30-Sep-2023	No					
New milestone - Letchworth Horticultural Therapy.			31-Mar-2024	No	Budget of £5K to deliver individual placements of 12/24 weeks during 2023/24.				
New milestone - Royston Emotional Wellbeing project.			31-Mar-2024	No	Two groups meeting every week throughout 2023/24.				
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
Risks - Inability to achieve funding for future years. - Delays in achieving funding. - Restrictive funding terms. - Staff shortages/competing priorities. Leading to: - Cessation of current projects/services. - Delays in achieving outcomes. - Limited scope of projects. - Limited progress with pursuing funding opportunities/delivering projects.		7	3	3					

	Economic Development Strategy	**Progress**	33%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	Develop Economic Development Strategy based on resources available.				
Latest Update	03-May-2023 Project superseded. Development of an Economic Development 'work stream' is now being progressed via an overarching Enterprise Strategy, incorporating Commercial, Economic Development and Tourism. Progress towards developing and adopting this Enterprise Strategy will be monitored via a new Council Delivery Plan project for 2023/24. Currently expect the new Strategy to be adopted by Cabinet in September 2023.				

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Complete ongoing recovery work funded by High Street Recovery Fund.	01-Apr-2022	Yes	Completed.
Delete previously recorded milestone - Develop budget bid to deliver proposed Economic Development Strategy.	31-Mar-2023	No	Superseded by the new 'Enterprise Strategy' Council Delivery Plan project for 2023/24.
Delete previously recorded milestone - Utilise feedback from recovery work to develop an	31-Mar-	No	Superseded by the new 'Enterprise Strategy' Council Delivery Plan project for 2023/24.

Economic Development Strategy for the four towns. Consult and develop an Economic Development Strategy for the rural community.			2023						
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Uncertainty over focus of the strategy. 2. Determination of level of priority and the funding to be allocated from 2023/24.		5	2	1					

	Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks	**Progress**	28%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Submit grant application to Office for Zero Emission Vehicles for funding. Further actions dependent on funding awarded.				
Latest Update	05-May-2023 Following completion of detailed costings, grant application submitted to OZEV by 31 March 2023. Now expect contract with private sector partner to be formalised by the end of May 2023. Decision on our application expected in May 2023, after which we will finalise the leases with the contractor and commence promotion of the project. Contractor to deliver project and install new EV charging points by end of March 2024, in line with funding requirements. As we have not yet received a decision on our grant application and are still to finalise key items with our partner, risk level still assessed as medium.				

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Identify private sector partner to assist with grant application and to provide 40% (originally 25%) of funding not met by grant as well as being responsible for ongoing maintenance and future proofing.	27-Mar-2023	No	Private sector partner identified, and grant application submitted. Formal contract to deliver the project still to be signed. Expect this to happen by 31 May 2023. Propose to amend milestone due date accordingly.
Establish detailed costings for grant application.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Detailed costings finalised and application submitted to OZEV by 31 March 2023.
Submit grant application to OZEV for 60% (originally 75%) of cost, with private partner providing the remaining 40% (originally 25%).	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Submitted to OZEV by 31 March 2023.
Decision on grant application received.	30-Apr-2023	No	Due date to change to 31 May 2023. We now expect to hear in May 2023 whether our grant application has been successful. Delivery of future project milestones will be dependent on grant funding being awarded.
New milestone - Complete relevant leases with contractor for the length of the contract.	31-Jul-2023	No	
New milestone - Contractor to commence works and NHC to start promoting project.	01-Aug-2023	No	
New milestone - Installation of all new EV charging points completed.	31-Mar-2024	No	

Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Not successful in obtaining grant funding. 2. Unable to identify/procure a private sector partner. 3. Unable to agree relevant lease arrangements with contractor.		5	5	1					

	Cycling Network	Progress	20%	Due Date	30-Nov-2023
Project Summary	Working with HCC as they develop a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). Use to inform a North Herts cycle strategy.				
Latest Update	05-May-2023 We continue to review LCWIP consultation findings with HCC. Expect this to be concluded in June 2023. Will then present report to Cabinet for comment and recommendations, prior to the LCWIP going to HCC for a decision on adoption. The adopted LCWIP will inform work on the NHC Cycle Strategy, but in the meantime, the draft version can still be used to seek contributions to planning applications. Risk level assessed as low, as the project continues to progress in line with anticipated timeframes.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Working with HCC on the production of a draft Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) - for formal consultation.	26-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.
New milestone - HCC/NHC finalise review of consultation findings.	09-Jun-2023	No	
New milestone - Report to NHC Cabinet for comment and recommendations on the LCWIP.	30-Jun-2023	No	
Adoption of LCWIP by HCC Highways Transport Panel/Cabinet.	31-Oct-2023	No	
Further milestones dependent on adoption of LCWIP.	30-Nov-2023	No	Further milestones relating to the development of a NHC Cycle Strategy to be considered/commenced at this time.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Resourcing for NHC and HCC. 2. Timing and adoption of LCWIP by HCC Transport Panel/Cabinet. 3. Limits to what can be achieved in the short-term.		3	2	1					

	EV Charging for Council Vehicles	Progress	100%	Due Date	31-May-2022
Project Summary	Install two charging points in DCO rear car park (charging for four vehicles).				
Latest Update	18-Aug-2022 The EV charging points were installed on 17 August 2022.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Install two charging points in DCO rear car park (charging for four vehicles).	31-May-2022	Yes	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target

1. Lead-in time from supplier could cause delays. 2. Number of options available makes it difficult to determine optimal option. (No longer a risk - option selected and contract awarded.)		5	1	1	Miles driven by NHC full electric vehicles			35,903	35,000

	Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal	**Progress**	28%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Installation of Solar Thermal technology at Royston Leisure Centre (RLC).				
Latest Update	27-Apr-2023 Following the unsuccessful procurement processes undertaken for this project, a consultant is currently investigating options for incorporating installation of solar thermal technology at RLC into the wider project of installing solar PV at the three main leisure facilities. Depending on the viability of installing both technologies at the same site, this has the potential to make the solar thermal element more attractive to bidders. The feasibility report was received at the end of May 2023, and is being reviewed to determine if and how this project will proceed. If it does proceed, installation is expected to be completed by the end of March 2024. Risk level assessed as medium, in view of the uncertainty still attached to the project pending receipt of the feasibility report.				

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Design specification.	31-May-2022	Yes	
Complete procurement and appoint contractor.	16-Dec-2022	Yes	Second procurement exercise closed on 31 January 2023. This was unsuccessful.
New Milestone - Feasibility report received from consultant.	31-May-2023	No	
New Milestone - Review report findings and decision on project viability.	30-Jun-2023	No	
New Milestone - If project proceeds, further milestones to be developed or incorporated into the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan project "Solar PV on Leisure Centres".	31-Jul-2023	No	
Delete previously recorded milestone - Installation of Solar Thermal.		No	No longer applicable in view of unsuccessful procurement processes. Replaced with new milestones relating to decision on project viability.
Delete previously recorded milestone - Meet with contractor to programme schedule of works.		No	No longer applicable in view of unsuccessful procurement processes. Replaced with new milestones relating to decision on project viability.

Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Solar Thermal not viable alongside installation of Solar PV. 2. Tender returns over budget. 3. Delays to procurement/project delivery.		5	5	5					

	Town Centre Strategies	**Progress**	20%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Complete High Level Town Centre Recovery Action Plans for each town. Develop project plan for detailed Plans based on high level report.				

Latest Update	26-Apr-2023 Resource issues have delayed progress. Currently undertaking a further recruitment exercise to appoint to new Project Officer role. Plan to appoint consultant to prepare evidence base for overarching Town Centre Strategy by 31 July 2023. Work on evidence base and preparation of draft Strategy expected to be completed by January 2024. Once completed, scoping report to be presented to Cabinet to agree overall approach and governance arrangements for progressing individual Town Centre masterplans. Concurrently, we have already commenced work with stakeholders to progress options for the Letchworth masterplan. Risk level still assessed as medium, as without approved strategy/masterplans, speculative development could undermine the function of our town centres.

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Consultants appointed to prepare High Level Town Centre Recovery Action Plans for each town centre.	30-Apr-2022	Yes	Consultants appointed and draft plans have now been received.
Cabinet report presenting draft Strategy and scoping report to agree overall project and governance arrangements for progressing individual Town Centre masterplans.	31-Jul-2023	No	Now anticipate presenting a report to Cabinet in March 2024. Propose to amend milestone due date accordingly.
New milestone - Appoint consultant to prepare evidence base for overarching Town Centre Strategy.	31-Jul-2023	No	
Progress work on Letchworth Town Centre masterplan, confirming/commencing detailed work following presentation of the Cabinet report.	31-Aug-2023	No	Propose to amend milestone due date to align with Cabinet report milestone (31 March 2024).
New milestone - Undertake work to complete evidence base and prepare draft Strategy.	31-Jan-2024	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Lack of available resource to produce and deliver identified strategies. 2. Lack of strategic direction leads to speculative development that undermines function of town centres.		5	5	1					

	Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review	**Progress**	37%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024

Project Summary	Complete feasibility study and report to Cabinet on options.
Latest Update	05-May-2023 Following the report to PLB in February 2023 and agreement to bring forward related Capital budget to 2023/24 and 2024/25, we are now progressing a project to replace all existing parking machines. This will include undertaking procurement exercises to appoint suppliers to replace the current machines and the tariff boards, which are both expected to be concluded by November 2023. A report will be presented to Cabinet in September to agree revised tariffs and post-payment options. Works are then expected to commence in January 2024 on undertaking trials and rolling out the phased two-year programme. Risk level assessed as low, with uncertainty surrounding completion of successful tenders, and public reaction to the changes and any associated disruption.

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Consultants appointed to produce Feasibility Study to be reported to Exec Member & Deputy.	31-Jul-2022	Yes	Consultants appointed and draft report produced. This has been discussed with the Executive Member and will be finalised shortly.
Report to PLB to get a steer on proceeding to a pay on exit trial.	01-Nov-2022	Yes	PLB agreed that officers should proceed with the necessary work in progressing a trial in two of the Council's car parks and report back within this financial year.
The Cabinet report determines further milestones.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Report to Cabinet not required. Following PLB decision in February 2023 to progress revised project and agreement to bring forward related Capital budget to 2023/24, project to replace all existing parking machines is now underway.

New milestone - Report presented to Cabinet to agree revised tariffs and post-payment options.	30-Sep-2023	No	
New milestone - Procure supplier to replace existing parking machines.	30-Nov-2023	No	
New milestone - Procure supplier to replace tariff boards.	30-Nov-2023	No	
New milestone - Update TROs.	31-Dec-2023	No	
New milestone - Contractor to commence works (phased two-year programme).	31-Jan-2024	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Budget implications of selected scheme. 2. Inability to procure suppliers within approved budget. 3. Negative public reaction to changes and disruption during works. 4. Loss of income during associated works.		1	1	1					

	Pursue commercial leasing opportunity for Royston Town Hall Annexe	**Progress**	33%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	In this year, to market the site on a non-committal basis to assess options. To then report to Cabinet for a decision. Project will span more than one year.				
Latest Update	14-Apr-2023 Despite numerous attempts to engage with HCC regarding the acquisition of rights over their land from the public highway, they have so far not responded to our requests. Without acquiring these vehicular access rights, the project cannot move forward in any meaningful way. The current expectation is that it could take a further 12 months to commence negotiations and if successful, to formalise arrangements. We continue to liaise with the interested party, although there is a risk that they may withdraw their interest if resolution of the rights issue is continually delayed. Risk level still assessed as medium, as progress is not completely in our control and there remains a possibility that the current project does not proceed.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Exploring options following unsolicited solid interest in site.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Initial discussions held with interested party regarding formalising use of NHC's land. This included the drafting of lease heads of terms. Not able to proceed in any meaningful way without acquiring vehicular access rights to our site.
Ascertain, acquire, and address rights and restrictions on the site.	31-May-2023	Yes	No access rights to serve NHC's site are documented. So far, HCC have been unwilling to engage with us regarding acquiring rights. The proposal is to now monitor this via two new milestones. No restrictions on title apparent from investigation. Property included in the project is not Listed, although it is in a Conservation Area. This needs to be factored into the design of any scheme to repurpose the site but for now, there is no further action to take.
New Milestone - Commencement of negotiations with HCC regarding the acquisition of vehicular access rights over their land from the public highway.	30-Sep-2023	No	Previously included under a combined milestone of "Ascertain, acquire, and address rights and restrictions on the site." with a due date of 31 May 2023.
Market test site for leasing and sale on non-committal basis. Undertake options appraisal. Seek Cabinet decision.	30-Nov-2023	No	Proposal to delete this milestone for now. If the access rights issue is resolved and the project moves forward, further milestones will be recorded at this time.

New Milestone - Completion of negotiations with HCC regarding the acquisition of vehicular access rights over their land and arrangements formalised.			31-Mar-2024	No	Previously included under a combined milestone of "Ascertain, acquire, and address rights and restrictions on the site." with a due date of 31 May 2023.				
New Milestone - Maintain ongoing dialogue with interested party whilst seeking to acquire access rights from HCC.			31-Mar-2024	No					
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Lack of engagement from HCC restricts our ability to acquire access rights. 2. Cost and time in acquiring rights or addressing restrictions are prohibitive. 3. Planning permission refused or subject to unviable conditions. 4. Desire to retain partial community use impinges on viability. 5. Build cost inflation impinges on viability.		5	5	3					

	**Customer Portal**				**Progress**	100%		**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	Research options for My Account, transformation programme to consider options for development, implement recommended options.								
Latest Update	18-Apr-2023 Consideration and investigation of improvements we can make to the customer experience and self-service options is now an ongoing business-as-usual activity. Cabinet agreed that this project and the associated risk entry would not be included in the 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan. Investigation of options for Waste is linked to the re-tendering of both the waste contract and the CRM contract, and it is unlikely to be taken forward until a new CRM contract has been awarded.								
Milestone			**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**				
Researching options for development of MyAccount.			31-Mar-2022	Yes	Milestone complete. We discussed options with relevant service areas, including Benefits, Housing and Licensing. We are potentially moving forward with a project to implement Waste into MyAccount, which would be beneficial due to the size of the service area.				
Transformation programme considers options for development.			31-May-2022	Yes	Milestone complete. The development of MyAccount is not reliant on the wider transformation programme, which is currently prioritising process automation.				
Pre-scoping meeting with Waste and MyAccount provider.			15-Sep-2022	Yes	Meeting held.				
Further development work for Waste implementation.			31-Mar-2023	Yes	Investigation of options for Waste is linked to the re-tendering of the waste contract and is unlikely to be taken forward until the existing CRM contract has been re-tendered.				
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Additional modules are not forthcoming.		5	2	2					

	**Help Residents Make Payments at Convenient Locations**	**Progress**	100%	**Due Date**	30-Nov-2022

Project Summary	Technology in place to allow payments to be made in different ways, including by cash at local shops.
Latest Update	25-Apr-2023 Project completed in November 2022, with ongoing communication now a business-as-usual activity. There remains a residual risk that residents will not use the options introduced, but numbers are starting to increase, and this is currently assessed as low risk. This risk will continue to be managed at service level. The related performance indicators will continue to be included in future monitoring reports to help identify related post-project trends.

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Complete procurement and appoint supplier.	31-Mar-2022	Yes	Completed.
Obtain IIN number and update documentation.	31-Aug-2022	Yes	Completed.
Send test file and payment.	01-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.
Go live - implementation completed.	19-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.
Communication to residents on new ways to pay and Allpay app.	30-Nov-2022	Yes	Initial communication completed. To continue on an ongoing basis, including at Annual Billing.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Resourcing issues delay progress. 2. Unexpected costs affect viability of business case. 3. Residents fail to use the service provided.		5	1	1	Percentage of NNDR collected in year			97.71%	93%
					Percentage of council tax collected in year			97.56%	95%
					Percentage of raised sales invoices due for payment that have been paid			98.23%	97%
					% of payments received that were paid by electronic methods			99.08%	99.3%

	Supplier Self-Service	**Progress**	100%	**Due Date**	31-May-2023
Project Summary	Technology in place that allows suppliers to update their details, submit invoices and view payments electronically.				
Latest Update	26-Apr-2023 The originally envisaged project has now ceased, and the previously recorded milestones are no longer relevant and have been removed. A new supplier portal will now be incorporated into the procurement of a joint cash management and financial system and will be taken forward as part of this project. The current timeframe is for the new contract to be awarded in July 2023 with system implementation by August 2024. Risk level assessed as low, as prior to a new supplier portal being available, the continuation of current supplier arrangements means there will be no significant adverse effects. Management of any associated risks will now be via the Project Risk Log.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Failure to find viable solution. 2. Resource issues delay progress. 3. Suppliers do not submit invoices via the portal, fail to achieve efficiencies. 4. Data security issues.		5	1	1					

	Empty Homes Strategy	**Progress**	33%	**Due Date**	01-Aug-2023
Project Summary	Develop and implement a strategy to reduce numbers of Empty Homes.				
Latest Update	22-Mar-2023 Staff resource to enable delivery of the final Strategy as part of a new Housing Improvement Officer role approved by Full Council on 23 February 2023. We anticipate adoption of the Strategy by Cabinet in summer/ autumn 2023, although we are still to determine if this will be at the 27 June or 26 September 2023 meetings. Current focus of the CDP action/risk is on the development and approval of a strategic approach to bringing empty properties back into use. Once an adopted Strategy is in place, if required, these will be reviewed and updated to reflect key implementation stages and risks to the successful achievement of stated objectives. Risks relating to Strategy adoption are assessed as low, with the implementation risk level being dependent on the preferred approach.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Development of Strategy and staff resources.	23-Feb-2023	Yes	Draft Strategy produced, but this still needs to be approved. Staff resource to enable delivery of the final Strategy approved by Full Council on 23 February 2023 (as part of a new Housing Improvement Officer role).
Adoption of Strategy by Cabinet.	31-Jul-2023	No	Now anticipate adoption by Cabinet by summer/autumn 2023 (still to determine if this will be 27 June or 26 September 2023 meeting). Due date will be amended to reflect the meeting selected.
Commence implementation of adopted Strategy, including securing the budget required to deliver the preferred approach.	01-Aug-2023	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
Development of Strategy Risks: - Staff shortages/competing priorities limit progress with developing Strategy. - Potential political/reputational risk associated with not having an agreed strategic approach in place. - Resource implications/limitations relating to the different options available. Implementation of Adopted Strategy Risks (dependent on the agreed approach): - Securing the resources required to deliver the Strategy and achieve objectives. - Limited number of empty homes that we can actually take forward		4	2	1					

under the Strategy. - Cost to Council of maintaining empty properties that we acquire. - Political/reputational risk associated with a perceived lack of progress and/or cost/benefit analysis of our approach.									

	New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land				**Progress**	40%		**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Alternative ways to deliver housing on surplus Council land (other than sale to a developer) to provide a greater financial return to the Council.								
Latest Update	14-Apr-2023 External Chartered Surveyor completed the market research exercise with a cross-section of the development market regarding options for joint ventures. The draft report has been received, with the final report still expected to be received in June 2023. A review of the final report findings/recommendations is expected to take one month, at which time we will be in a position to report on the preferred options. Once there is some clarity regarding the options available, further milestones will be added to the Council Delivery Plan monitoring report. Risk level still assessed as medium, although this will be re-assessed once we have considered the final report.								

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Determine a way forward/partnership agreement with current provider.	31-Mar-2022	Yes	Establishing a way forward with the current provider was unsuccessful.
Start to consider other options for delivery.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Following advice from Procurement, external Chartered Surveyor undertook a market research exercise with a cross-section of the development market regarding options for joint ventures. Draft report received.
New Milestone - Final market research report received from Chartered Surveyor.	31-May-2023	No	
New Milestone - Review report findings/recommendations.	30-Jun-2023	No	
New Milestone - Dependent on market research findings, develop milestones/timings to report and make a formal decision on the preferred way forward.	31-Jul-2023	No	

Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Being able to develop a viable project. 2. Ensuring Contract Procurement Rules are adhered to. 3. Housing development subject to planning. 4. Working with the right supplier(s) for the Council. 5. Lack of demand and absorption rate for tenure and build type.		5	5	5					

	Work with Stakeholders to Increase Accommodation Options for Single Homeless People				**Progress**	100%		**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	Working with One YMCA/Haven First to secure development of purpose-built accommodation in Letchworth. Work with partners to deliver general and specialist accommodation.								

Latest Update	05-May-2023 All milestones for 2022/23 have been completed. As previously reported, this support aims to help mitigate the risk of homelessness associated with single homeless people with complex needs. However, the threat of homelessness not only relates to individuals and couples, but to families too. As such, for 2023/24, Council Delivery Plan monitoring (via a new action and milestones) will focus on activities to enhance our work with partners to prevent and relieve homelessness for all of those affected. This aligns better with the currently reported risk of increased levels of homelessness, which remains high due to many different factors e.g., the high support needs of homeless adults experiencing multiple disadvantage, the cost-of-living crisis, limited access to the private rented sector, availability of affordable housing and demands of refugee schemes.

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Work with Haven First to secure development of hostel accommodation in Letchworth.	31-Oct-2022	Yes	Haven First are merging with One YMCA and early indications are they will still look to proceed with the development of a new hostel for single homeless people in Letchworth that secured planning permission in February 2021. The Council's limited role is complete, and it is now for Haven First/One YMCA to progress and to confirm project details/timings.
Application and utilisation of grant funding to secure specialist provision.	13-Dec-2022	Yes	On 13 December 2022, Cabinet approved the 2022/23 allocation of Homelessness Prevention Grant funding and the allocation of Rough Sleeping Initiative funding for the financial years 2022/23 to 2024/25.
Work with partners to secure accommodation for those with specific support needs.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	This is an ongoing activity and throughout 2022/23, we continued to explore options for increasing accommodation solutions for people with specific support needs. As such, for the purpose of this Council Delivery Plan item, the milestone is considered complete.
Work with partners to secure general accommodation for homeless people.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	This is an ongoing activity and throughout 2022/23, we continued to explore options for increasing accommodation solutions for all homeless families/people. As such, for the purpose of this Council Delivery Plan item, the milestone is considered complete.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. An excessive demand from the public for housing services. 2. A lack of alternative housing options. 3. An increase in the levels of homelessness. 4. An increased use of hotel accommodation for homeless households. 5. Major difficulties for some members of the public to access the private rented sector. 6. High levels of support are required for some clients/families.		8	8	5	Number of households living in temporary accommodation			98	

	Local Plan Implementation	**Progress**	100%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	Adoption of Local Plan by Council.				
Latest Update	04-May-2023 Adoption of Local Plan completed. The 2023/24 Council Delivery Plan will monitor the development of policies to aid delivery and the preparations for a Local Plan review. The 2023/24 CDP will also continue to monitor the progress of Master Plans for the six strategic sites included in the Plan.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Receipt of Inspector's letter.	30-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.

Adoption of Plan by Full Council.			30-Nov-2022	Yes	Completed.				
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Delay in inspectors report on the new Local Plan, resulting in a longer period without appropriate guidance (risk removed). 2. Increased uncertainty of planning policy base (risk removed). 3. Delay or failure to adoption/implementation of the new Local Plan (risk removed). 4. Legal challenge to Local Plan (minor residual risk remains). 5. Intervention by the Secretary of State i.e., issuing a holding direction (risk removed). 6. 'Hostile' applications in areas not designated within the Local Plan.		9	6	6					

	**Master Planning**	**Progress**	25%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024	
Project Summary	Secure funding for Master Plans. Develop Master Plans and seek adoption. Focus is on 6 Strategic sites (approximately 8,500 homes in total) that account for the majority of homes, although there are 12 other sites (approximately 2,500 additional homes) presently captured by masterplan policy requirements.					
Latest Update	05-May-2023 The Council has set out its expectations and secured funding through Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) and / or planning fees for the six sites that form the focus of this Council Delivery Plan project. Work is ongoing to produce and present the site-specific masterplans. The draft masterplan for Highover Farm was presented to Project Board in 2022 but will be formally determined as part of an outline planning application. No pre-application masterplans were formally presented or approved during 2022/23. Going forward, site-specific milestones have now been introduced in place of the previously recorded milestone relating to the presentation of masterplans to Project Board. These new milestones, relating to five of the six Strategic Sites in the adopted Local Plan, will allow more accurate, ongoing monitoring over the course of the year ahead. Approval arrangements for the sixth site (East of Luton, Local Plan Policy SP19) have yet to be agreed between the Council and the landowner team.					

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
1. Liaise with developers and identify the Council's expectations with regard master planning.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Masterplan briefs have been issued for five of the six sites. For the sixth site (Highover Farm), a masterplan has been prepared as part of an existing outline planning application lodged with the Council which has been informed by Council officer feedback.
2. Secure funding for master planning through the development of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) to seek to cover NHC and HCC costs as far as is practicable.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	PPAs have been agreed for five of the six sites that are preparing masterplans. For the sixth site (Highover Farm), a masterplan has been prepared as part of an existing outline application lodged with the Council.
Delete previously recorded milestone - 3. Present master plans to Project Board for comment and support to forward onto Full Council or Planning Committee as appropriate for approval.	31-Mar-2023	No	To be replaced with new project-specific milestones relating to five of the six Strategic Sites in the adopted Local Plan to allow more accurate, ongoing monitoring over the course of the year ahead.
New milestone - Consideration of Highover Farm masterplan by Planning Committee (18/01154/OP, Local Plan Policy SP17).	30-Jun-2023	No	
New milestone - Approval of pre-application Strategic Masterplan for GA2 North-east of Great Ashby (Local Plan Policy SP18).	31-Dec-2023	No	
New milestone - Approval of pre-application Strategic Masterplan for NS1 North of Stevenage	31-Dec-	No	

(Local Plan Policy SP16).			2023						
New milestone - Approval of pre-application Strategic Masterplan for Baldock sites (Local Plan Policies SP14, BA2, BA3 & BA10).			31-Mar-2024	No					
New milestone - Approval of pre-application Strategic Masterplan for LG1 North of Letchworth (Local Plan Policy SP15).			31-Mar-2024	No					
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Risk of poor scheme outcomes that do not appropriately respond to local character and context. 2. Risk that strategic sites do not maximise contribution to corporate objectives and priorities of climate change, environment, economy and place. 3. Risk of delay to delivery of strategic sites if masterplan process is delayed or stalled or provides insufficient information to guide subsequent planning applications. 4. Failure to secure funding to resource the process. 5. Reduction in pre-application income and delay to income from planning applications. 6. Failure to recruit sufficiently experienced officers. 7. Risk of adverse appeal findings on other/non-Local Plan sites if delivery is delayed or stalled.		5	5	3					

	Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget	**Progress**	40%	**Due Date**	29-Feb-2024
Project Summary	To deliver a medium term balanced budget for the Council that reflects Council priorities.				
Latest Update	04-May-2023 2023/24 Budget approved by Council in February.				

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Medium Term Financial Strategy (aligned to Council Plan) approved by Council.	22-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.
Budget for 2023/24 approved by Council.	23-Feb-2023	Yes	Completed.
Respond to expected consultation on funding reform.	30-Sep-2023	No	Not now expected to have consultation until summer 2023.
New milestone - Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Council.	23-Nov-2023	No	
New milestone - Budget for 2024/25 approved by Council.	29-Feb-2024	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Funding reductions as a result of new funding formula. 2. Sales, fees, and charges income continues at a lower level due to changes in behaviour from Covid-19 and impact of 'cost of living'. 3. Not able to make the required decisions to deliver budget savings required. 4. Increases in costs (reductions in income) when contracts are renewed and as a result of inflationary increases.		9	9	5					

	Full Review of Council Tax Reduction Scheme	Progress	100%	Due Date	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	Implement a new scheme that is affordable, easy to administer and understand and fair to recipients.				
Latest Update	06-Apr-2023 New scheme implemented from 1 April 2023. Generally, the new scheme has been well received.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Engage consultant to support the project.	31-Mar-2022	Yes	Completed.
Options appraisals conducted and consultation carried out with public and major preceptors.	30-Oct-2022	Yes	Options appraisals completed 23 June 2022. Consultation period ended 30 October 2022.
Reports to Committees - September, December, and January.	31-Jan-2023	Yes	Update reported to Cabinet on 13 September 2022. Further update presented to PLB on 1 November 2022. Details of proposed new scheme reported to Cabinet (13 December 2022) and Full Council (19 January 2023).
Scheme implemented.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	New scheme implemented from 1 April 2023.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Lack of resources and specific skills to deliver. 2. Impact on the project of consultation outcomes.		5	3	3					

	Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy	Progress	100%	Due Date	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	For this year, to engage with Councillors on a service design for the forthcoming new contract process. Actions in relation to new contract and finalising service design will follow in 2023/24 onwards.				
Latest	23-Mar-2023 With the publication of the Selection Questionnaire on 10 March 2023, all milestones for 2022/23 have now been completed. For CDP purposes, this action will be closed down at the end of				

Update	2022/23, with two new actions (and associated risks) being introduced for 2023/24 that lead on from the progress made so far. These new actions are "Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Procurement" and "Waste Depot".

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Initial member consultation and service design.	25-Aug-2022	Yes	Member consultation completed. Consisted of joint cross-party workshops over two months. Additional member briefings also undertaken to outline the proposed service design.
Report presented to O&S.	28-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.
Pre-engagement.	18-Oct-2022	Yes	Pre-engagement work is complete.
Report presented to Cabinet.	25-Oct-2022	Yes	Report presented to the Extraordinary Cabinet meeting held on 25 October 2022.
Project Board established.	30-Nov-2022	Yes	Completed.
Publication of Selection Questionnaire (SQ).	28-Feb-2023	Yes	Completed - The SQ publication date was 10 March 2023.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Delays in confirmation of government strategy or legislation. 2. Protracted decision making. 3. Lack of interest from suppliers. 4. Increased cost uncertainty. 5. Reduced income from chargeable services. 6. Protracted contract negotiations. 7. Confusion by residents over new services. 8. Reduction in resident satisfaction due to requirements to recycle more etc. 9. Impact on Council reputation due to difficult service change mobilisation. 10. Failure by Government to honour 'New Burdens' doctrine.		9	9	5	Kg residual waste per household			350kg	350kg
					Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting			54.92%	56.5%

	Green Space Management Strategy	Progress	100%	Due Date	31-Mar-2023
Project Summary	For this year, installation of interactive play, wilding projects and other projects (as determined).				
Latest Update	17-Apr-2023 The four completed interactive play equipment projects continue to be well used. Wilding initiatives are now established ongoing activities and we continue to work with CMS, local groups and residents to manage/expand these. There are no significant residual risks associated with this completed CDP project.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note

Installation of interactive play.	16-Sep-2022	Yes	Four projects completed/opened.
Wilding project.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Associated works managed by CMS during 2022/23 and wilding initiatives now established ongoing activities.

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Tenders received are not within budget.		1	1	1					

	Charnwood House	**Progress**	63%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Leasing the property as a Community Hub.				
Latest Update	14-Apr-2023 Council approved a budget to address the works required on site. We have engaged with a number of external agents regarding undertaking a light marketing exercise. We now expect this to commence by the end of June 2023 and it will last between 6 weeks-4 months. Depending on the range and number of responses, evaluation of the options is expected to take a further 4 months. A report on the preferred options will then be presented to Cabinet by the end of March 2024, prior to finalising arrangements i.e., negotiate Heads of Terms with selected tenant, seek further Cabinet decision, complete lease. Risk level still assessed as medium, although this could decrease, depending on the results of the marketing exercise and the tenant selected.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Exploration of options.	31-Mar-2022	Yes	Milestone specified in the approved Council Delivery Plan entered in error. Therefore, milestone completed and retained for audit purposes.
Market site (informally) for leasing as community hub, on non-committal basis.	29-Jul-2022	Yes	Meeting with interested parties held on 29 July 2022 to galvanise interest.
Asbestos removed and air testing completed.	12-Oct-2022	Yes	Completed.
Updated survey and costings for refurbishment works received.	08-Dec-2022	Yes	Completed.
Options report received.	11-Jan-2023	Yes	Completed.
Appraise options report and the remedial works/costings highlighted in the updated survey.	23-Feb-2023	Yes	Completed.
Council decision on project budget.	23-Feb-2023	Yes	Completed.
Undertake light marketing exercise.	30-Jun-2023	No	Propose to amend due date to 31 October 2023. Now expected to commence by the end of June 2023 and it will last between 6 weeks-4 months.
New Milestone - Following marketing exercise, evaluate options.	29-Feb-2024	No	
New Milestone - Present report to Cabinet on the preferred options.	31-Mar-2024	No	

When Cabinet report presented, finalise arrangements i.e., negotiate Heads of Terms with selected tenant, seek further Cabinet decision, complete lease.			31-Mar-2024	No	Due dates still to be confirmed, although likely to be in 2024/25. Will be split into individual milestones at the appropriate time.				
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Covenant restriction on use. 2. Statute restriction on use. 3. Viability of Listed Building consent conditions. 4. Demand for community hub. 5. Delays due to Asset of Community Value (ACV) listing.		5	5	3					

	**Museum Storage**	**Progress**	20%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Overall to construct a fit-for-purpose museum storage facility. In this year to complete work to enable construction to commence from 2023/24.				
Latest Update	25-Apr-2023 Following the provision of expert procurement advice, we appointed a contractor via the SCAPE framework to conduct an initial feasibility report on the project. This report was received in mid-April 2023. We are now awaiting a report relating to the options for including a commercial storage facility as part of the re-development, and this is expected by mid-May 2023. Therefore, we anticipate reviewing the findings of the feasibility and commercial reports, and reviewing the options with Accounts, by the end of June 2023. The results from these investigations will then be reported to Leadership Team, PLB and Cabinet to seek a decision on the preferred way forward and developing a detailed Business Case. As there remain many unknowns relating to if and how the project will proceed, the previously recorded milestones will be replaced with ones reflecting the steps to the first key decision point, with further milestones being added once there is more certainty regarding the actual project to be delivered. At this early stage, there remains uncertainty regarding viability and costs, and so the risk level is still assessed as medium.				

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
New milestone - Appoint contractor to conduct an initial feasibility report on the project.	28-Feb-2023	Yes	
Delete previously recorded milestone - Finalise Business Case and specification, and seek approvals.	31-Mar-2023	No	To be replaced with new milestones for 2023 reflecting the steps to the first key decision point, in view of there being many unknowns relating to if and how the project will proceed.
New milestone - Receive initial feasibility report.	18-Apr-2023	Yes	
New milestone - Receive report on options for including a commercial storage facility as part of the re-development.	19-May-2023	No	
Delete previously recorded milestone - Agree the design and submit planning application along with seeking other required permissions.	30-Jun-2023	No	To be replaced with new milestones for 2023 reflecting the steps to the first key decision point, in view of there being many unknowns relating to if and how the project will proceed.
Existing Bury Mead site to be cleared prior to works commencing (although the previous Hitchin Museum building is no longer an option to help with this).	30-Jun-2023	No	Although the project is in the early stages, it is still currently anticipated that the clearance of the existing site will take place by the end of June 2023.
New milestone - Review findings of feasibility/commercial reports, including assessing finance options with Accounts.	30-Jun-2023	No	
New milestone - Report presented to Leadership Team, PLB and Cabinet seeking a decision on the preferred way forward.	31-Aug-2023	No	
New milestone - Develop further milestones to reflect Cabinet decision e.g., appoint Project	30-Sep-	No	

Manager/Quantity Surveyor, finalise Business Case and detailed specifications.			2023						
Delete previously recorded milestone - Move to construction phase will commence in 2023/24.			31-Oct-2023	No	To be replaced with new milestones for 2023 reflecting the steps to the first key decision point, in view of there being many unknowns relating to if and how the project will proceed.				
Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Funding the project. 2. Unforeseen issues with the development. 3. Lower utilisation of the commercial storage opportunity than expected. 4. Until the project is completed, risk of damage to items stored at the current facility (mainly reputational, but potentially financial).		5	5	3					

	**Local Government Boundary Review**	**Progress**	75%	**Due Date**	31-May-2023	
Project Summary	To support and consult on the Boundary Review.					
Latest Update	26-Apr-2023 LGBCE have delayed publication of their final recommendations, as these are contingent on them receiving legal advice, which they have not yet received. We are hopeful that the recommendations will now be published sometime in May 2023 (as indicated by the Commission), at which time, we will assess the associated implications and risks. Until this time, there are no further actions to take and all key milestones to achieve the submission to the Commission were met.					

Milestone	**Due Date**	**Complete**	**Note**
Provision of any additional information to LGBCE on warding patterns.	31-May-2022	Yes	
Consultation on warding patterns by LGBCE with Council, Political Groups and General Public.	18-Oct-2022	Yes	Consultation closed on 10 August 2022. NHC submission submitted on 21 July 2022. LGBCE met on 18 October 2022.
Consultation on draft recommendations with Council, Political Groups and General Public.	10-Jan-2023	Yes	NHC submitted its response to the LGBCE consultation on warding arrangements by the relevant closing date.
LGBCE publishes its final recommendation.	28-Mar-2023	No	Propose to change due date to 31 May 2023 to reflect LGBCE's revised timeframe for publishing the recommendations.

Risks	**Risk Level**	**Original Score**	**Current Score**	**Target Score**	**Performance Indicators**	**Status**	**Trend**	**Value**	**Target**
1. Failure to meet set deadlines. 2. Failure to agree NHC consultation submission. 3. Review outcomes could lead to further challenge/review.		3	3	3					

	**Shared Prosperity Fund**	**Progress**	41%	**Due Date**	31-Mar-2024
Project	Deliver projects to support the aims of the Shared Prosperity Fund, as agreed with Government.				

Summary	
Latest Update	09-May-2023 Some spend in 2022/23 with plans in place to spend the remainder in 2023/24.

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Submit Investment Plan.	28-Jul-2022	Yes	Completed.
Work with Government on approval of Investment Plan.	31-Dec-2022	Yes	Completed.
Deliver projects: Continue community wealth fund.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Partly completed in 2022/23. Some elements rolled forward to 2023/24 and milestone now replaced with new milestones for 2023/24.
Deliver projects: Recruit sports development officer. Deliver outdoor fitness classes and first set of new outdoor exercise equipment.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Partly completed in 2022/23. Some elements rolled forward to 2023/24 and milestone now replaced with new milestones for 2023/24.
Deliver projects: Town Centre regeneration plans and initial activities.	31-Mar-2023	Yes	Partly completed in 2022/23. Some elements rolled forward to 2023/24 and milestone now replaced with new milestones for 2023/24.
New milestone - Approve BIDs (and other town centre stakeholder groups) plans for use of town centre improvement funding.	30-Jun-2023	No	
New milestone - Recruit fitness project manager, and commence fitness classes based on GP referrals.	30-Jun-2023	No	
New milestone - Installation of outdoor fitness equipment in Baldock.	31-Mar-2024	No	Milestone and related due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Installation of outdoor fitness equipment in Hitchin.	31-Mar-2024	No	Milestone and related due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Installation of outdoor fitness equipment in Letchworth.	31-Mar-2024	No	Milestone and related due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Installation of outdoor fitness equipment in Royston.	31-Mar-2024	No	Milestone and related due date to be confirmed.
New milestone - Provide 2023/24 (and 2022/23 rolled forward) allocation of funding for town centre improvements.	31-Mar-2024	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. Lack of general resources to deliver these projects as they are on top of core Council activities. 2. Failure to spend the money by the end of the grant period. 3. Lack of expertise in providing the required returns to Government on use of the grant. 4. Long lead times for capital elements means that items are unavailable until beyond the end of the funding period.		5	5	3					

	Churchgate	Progress	44%	Due Date	31-Mar-2024
Project Summary	Identifying, consulting on, and delivering long-term regeneration of the shopping centre and surrounding areas.				
Latest Update	03-May-2023 Phase 1 public consultation completed in February 2023 and data analysed. Next key stage is procurement and appointment of consultant to develop a viable regeneration project aligned with the Council's vision and the findings of initial/further consultation exercises. Now plan to provide an overview of Phase 1 consultation findings once the consultant has been appointed and further work has been undertaken to identify key themes and develop our vision. Still intend to provide an in-person hub to provide the local community with an opportunity to engage with the Council throughout the project. However, this has been subject to delay due to issues securing the use of the previously identified location, and it is now expected to open in summer 2023. Further milestones to be added once the consultant has been appointed, and these will reflect the agreed work programme to drive the project forward. Risk level still assessed as high due to the level of uncertainty present at this early stage of the project.				

Milestone	Due Date	Complete	Note
Set up project board.	30-Sep-2022	Yes	Completed.
Produce project plan, including communications plan.	31-Oct-2022	Yes	Project plan in place and in line with NHC's Project Management Framework.
Report back to Council setting out short, medium and long-term approach with draft project plan.	31-Jan-2023	Yes	Completed.
Conduct public consultation (Phase 1).	28-Feb-2023	Yes	Phase 1 survey closed 5 February 2023 and data analysed with Zencity.
Open in-person project hub.	17-Mar-2023	No	In-person hub, providing the local community with an opportunity to engage with the Council throughout the project, now expected to open by 31 July 2023.
Sharing results, by releasing top level information to the community via Comms.	17-Mar-2023	No	Now plan to provide an overview of Phase 1 consultation findings once the consultant has been appointed and further work has been undertaken to identify key themes and develop our vision. Various communication channels to be used, as defined in the Comms Plan.Proposal to change due date to align with the opening of the in-person hub (31 July 2023).
New milestone - Project Board approve specification for consultant appointment.	31-May-2023	No	
New milestone - Procure and appoint consultant to develop viable regeneration project.	30-Jun-2023	No	
New milestone - Digital hub goes live.	31-Jul-2023	No	

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score	Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
1. The regeneration will not meet expectations of stakeholders. 2. Regeneration of the Centre and surrounding area is not cost effective/not affordable. Including impacts of high inflation and likely recession.		9	9	6					

PIs and Risks Not Linked to Specific Projects

Risks	Risk Level	Original Score	Current Score	Target Score
Vital additional actions require resources (e.g., staff and financial) to be redirected to enable them to be provided, which affects the delivery of other projects within the Council Delivery Plan. The cost-of-living crisis is leading to Government providing targeted support to individuals/households, some of which requires our support to administer. The shortage of staff and other resources may affect our ability to respond, even if money is available. Significant difficulties in being able to recruit to roles in some key areas.		8	8	2

Performance Indicators	Status	Trend	Value	Target
Electricity and gas energy consumption (kWh) - 100% of reported energy consumption is from green energy sources			2,001,588	2,543,620

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CABINET
27 June 2023

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: REVENUE BUDGET OUTTURN 2022/23

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND IT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the summary position on revenue income and expenditure as at the end of the financial year 2022/23. The net outturn of £15.818million represents a £920k decrease from the net working budget of £16.738 million. The significant variances are detailed and explained in table 4. There are corresponding requests to carry forward £184k of unspent budget to fund specific projects that will now take place in 2023/24. There is a further forecast impact on the 2023/24 base budget of a £231k decrease.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet note this report.

2.2. That Cabinet approves a decrease of £920k in the 2022/23 net General Fund expenditure, as identified in table 4 and paragraph 8.1, to a total of £15.818million.

2.3. That Cabinet approves the changes to the 2023/24 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.3, a total £47k decrease in net expenditure.

That Cabinet recommends to Council

2.4. That Council approves the net transfer from earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £5.274million.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

3.2. Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Budget holders have considered the options to manage within the existing budget but consider the variances reported here necessary and appropriate.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation on the budget monitoring report is not required. Members will be aware that there is wider consultation on budget estimates during the corporate business planning process each year.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1. The report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 21st of April 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. Council approved the revenue budget for 2022/23 of £18.198million in February 2022. At the end of the financial year, the working budget has decreased to £16.738million. Table 1 below details the approved changes to this budget to get to the current working budget:

Table 1 - Current Working Budget

	£k
Original Revenue Budget for 2022/23 approved by Full Council	18,198
Quarter 3 2021/22 Revenue Budget Monitoring report – 2022/23 budget changes approved by Cabinet (March 2022)	238
2021/22 Revenue Budget Outturn Report – 2022/23 budget changes approved by Cabinet (June 2022)	179
Quarter 1 2022/23 Revenue Monitoring report - 2022/23 variances approved by Cabinet (September 2022)	(559)
Quarter 2 2022/23 Revenue Monitoring report - 2022/23 variances approved by Cabinet (December 2022)	(270)
2023/24 Revenue Budget report – leisure investment bids brought forward to spend in 2022/23 approved by Council (February 2023)	42
Quarter 3 2022/23 Revenue Monitoring report - 2022/23 variances approved by Cabinet (March 2023)	(1,090)
Current Working Budget	**16,738**

7.2. The Council is managed under Service Directorates. Table 2 below confirms the current net direct resource allocation of each Service Directorate and how this has changed from the original net direct budget allocations for 2022/23.

Table 2 – 2022/23 Service Directorate Budget Allocations

	Managing Director	Customers	Enterprise	Legal & Community	Place	Regulatory Services	Resources	**Total**
	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k	£k
Original Budget	**3,422**	**3,866**	**(148)**	**2,281**	**4,720**	**1,407**	**2,650**	**18,198**
Q3 2021/22	104	10	(4)	50	(15)	43	50	**238**
Outturn 2021/22	135	52	0	(9)	(51)	52	0	**179**
Q1 2022/23	(2,201)	371	(113)	61	770	535	18	**(559)**
Q2 2022/23	(386)	(69)	27	51	(217)	302	22	**(270)**
Budget 2023/24	0	0	0	0	42	0	0	**42**
Q3 2022/23	(449)	(37)	(132)	(41)	293	(667)	(57)	**(1,090)**
Other Changes	(268)	152	131	108	96	(80)	(139)	**0**
Current Budget	**357**	**4,345**	**(239)**	**2,501**	**5,638**	**1,592**	**2,544**	**16,738**

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. Cabinet are asked to approve the net expenditure on the General Fund in 2022/23 of £15.818 million (recommendation 2.2). This is a net decrease of £920k on the working budget of £16.738million. Table 3 below confirms the net expenditure for each Service Directorate and the variance with the current working budget. The major changes reported during the year are recorded at Appendix A.

Table 3 - 2022/23 Revenue Outturn by Service Directorate

Directorate	Net Direct Working Budget	Net Direct Outturn*	(Under) / Overspend
Managing Director	357	250	(107)
Customers Directorate	4,345	3,806	(539)
Enterprise Directorate	(239)	(298)	(59)
Legal & Community Directorate	2,501	2,395	(106)
Place Directorate	5,638	5,604	(34)
Regulatory Services Directorate	1,592	1,576	(16)
Resources Directorate	2,544	2,485	(59)
TOTAL	**16,738**	**15,818**	**(920)**

* Directorate outturn totals exclude year-end finance lease accounting entries. These entries have a net zero impact on the Council's General Fund, but their inclusion would distort the Directorate performance indicated in the table.

8.2. Table 4 below highlights and explains the most significant variances, which are generally more than £25k. The final columns detail if there is expected to be an impact on next year's (2023/24) budget.

Table 4 - Summary of significant variances at Outturn

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2023/24 £k
Managing Director External Audit Fees	75	101	+26	Overspend variance is indicative of both estimated additional fees for the 2021/22 final accounts audit, which is not yet complete, and increases in the fees incurred in respect of the Housing Benefit claim certification. The estimated ongoing impact reflects the £9k increase to the base audit scale fee, as confirmed by the PSAA, and an increase in the unit price for testing undertaken in respect of the Housing Benefit certification.	0	13
Government Grant Income	0	(22)	(22)	Redmond Review Local Audit fees grant of £21.5k was received to support the increase in 2022/23 audit fees associated with the implementation of the Redmond Review recommendations.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2023/24 £k
Managing Director Strategic Priorities Fund	83	0	(83)	This fund was created to enable short-term investments in Council priorities, including testing out new ideas and where there is an invest-to-save opportunity. There are amounts committed in future years to cover community engagement software, improving automation of waste charging and implementing a Social Value Portal.	83	0
Managing Director Interest Income	(1,277)	(1,310)	(33)	Investment interest rates have continued to rise, with the Bank of England base rate increasing from 3.5% to 4% and then again to 4.25% during the quarter. The average interest rate return on all outstanding investments at the end of Q4 therefore rose to 4.19%, compared to 3.21% at the end of Q3. There is no ongoing impact as increases in interest rates to around this level were already factored in to the calculation of the interest income anticipated in 2023/24 in the budget estimates presented to Council for approval in February.	0	0
Customers IT Support and Maintenance	192	139	(53)	The underspend relates to the £53k investment budget for the scanning of Planning micro-fiche records included in the budget total. This investment budget was not required as the work, completed in March, has instead been fully funded from Covid Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) grant money. This reflects that the records can now be accessed electronically and without the close support required to use the micro-fiche machine.	0	0
Customers Careline Installation and Maintenance Costs	287	116	(171)	The non-complex needs installation and maintenance service was brought in-house part way through the year, which has resulted in a saving compared to the previously outsourced contract. The estimated ongoing saving was presented as an efficiency proposal in compiling the revenue budget for 2023/24.	0	0
Customers New Burdens Grant from Government	(65)	(207)	(142)	Additional New Burdens grants have been received from DLUHC this year for the administrative burden of delivering both the Council Tax rebate scheme and Covid-19 business grant schemes respectively. These were delivered within existing resource and hence the grant amounts received have not been required to meet additional costs. It is requested that the unspent grant is transferred to reserve to finance developments within the Revenues and Benefits service in the coming years, which will improve operational efficiency and enhance the customer experience.	0	0
Transfer to Earmarked Reserve	13	155	+142		0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2023/24 £k
Customers Council Tax & NNDR Summons Income	(178)	(260)	(82)	This is due to an increase in the number of summons issued compared to the previous year, with a total of 4,421 in 2022/23 compared to 2,874 summons issued in 2021/22. The increase is mainly due to a return to business-as-usual after the pandemic.	0	0
Customers Covid Grant Income	0	(39)	(39)	The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) carried out a supplementary reconciliation process back in June 22 and have provided another payment to North Herts to reimburse grant payments made to businesses. As these were payments that had originally been paid incorrectly by the Council, due to either businesses providing the wrong bank details or input error, it had been assumed that these payments would not be reimbursed by BEIS and as such the payments were charged as a cost to the General Fund in 2021/22.	0	0
Customers Net housing benefit payments	305	336	+31	Increase in net cost compared to the working budget estimate is primarily due to a reassessment of certain central benefits by the DWP during the year. This resulted in the backdated removal of housing benefit subsidy reimbursement for housing benefit payments made under the local war disablement / war widows' scheme.	0	0
Customers Housing Benefit Overpayments Income	(325)	(277)	+48	Reduction in overpayments raised in year is attributed to a combination of both; the fall in the total amount of housing benefits paid, reducing by more than 25% over the last two years as working age claimants migrate to the Universal Credit scheme administered by the DWP; and ongoing improvements to systems and processes, with updated records downloaded directly from DWP every day helping to minimise overpayment values.	0	50
Contribution to overpayments income bad debt provision	300	28	(272)	The Council must make provision to recognise that not all the overpayments identified will ultimately be clawed back. Relatively lower levels of overpayments raised in recent years, combined with a higher proportion of overpayments debt successfully collected, have contributed to reducing the overall amount of overpayments debt outstanding from £1.2m to £885k over the past 12 months. This has reduced the level of provision required at the end of the year and hence reduced the contribution needed from the General Fund.	0	(250)

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2023/24 £k
Enterprise Net Income from Churchgate Shopping Centre	(143)	(281)	(138)	This is the additional net income receivable following the Council's acquisition of the head leasehold interest last summer. This is in addition to the rental income that we previously received from owning the freehold. As set out in the Revenue Budget report 2023/24, the surplus income is requested to be set aside in a reserve to support the planning and delivery of the Churchgate regeneration project.	0	0
Transfer to Earmarked Reserve	0	138	+138		0	0
Enterprise Burymead Storage Survey	30	0	(30)	This investment budget is for the temporary storage costs associated with the building of a new museum storage facility. A developer has not yet been appointed as options are still being reviewed. It is therefore requested that the budget is carried forward to fund the activity in next year.	30	0
Legal & Community Area Committees	51	39	(12)	The carry forward of £12.3k of unspent Area Committee budgets is requested. This total is comprised of £5.1k for Hitchin, £4.1k for Baldock, £2.2k for Southern Rural, £0.8k for Royston and £0.1k for Letchworth. The Hitchin carry forward balance includes £1.4k for grants that were awarded at the March meeting but could not be paid before the year end.	12	0
Legal & Community District ward boundary proposals Consultant Costs	31	21	(10)	The Council's response to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England second consultation on draft proposals for the district ward boundaries has been submitted. The response from the Boundary Commission has however been delayed as they are seeking legal advice and, depending on the outcome, there is a possibility that a third consultation by the Commission may be conducted on all or part of the proposals. The services of the consultant will be required if a third consultation is undertaken and therefore a carry forward of £10k is requested to fund this work.	10	0
Place Leisure Management Contract Fee Income	(671)	(578)	+93	Overall usage of the facilities had generally recovered to pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year. As we have been operating on an open-book basis we also need to fund any reasonably incurred increases in costs. High inflation has had a particular impact on staff pay, utilities and chemical costs.	0	0
Place Garden Waste Service Income	(1,223)	(1,251)	(28)	The overachievement of income corresponds to the growing number of subscribers, as highlighted in the quarterly monitoring of the corporate financial health indicators throughout the year.	0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2023/24 £k
Place Shared Waste Client Team – Contribution from East Herts	(245)	(265)	(20)	Half of the cost of the Shared Client Team is invoiced to East Herts Council. The variance this year is due to the higher than anticipated staff pay award for 2022/23. The impact on the additional costs incurred has already been reflected in budget forecasts.	0	(19)
Place AFM (Alternative Financial Model) Funded Expenditure	92	56	(36)	This budget was earmarked to cover the costs of consultant work on the procurement of the new waste contract. In the event however some of these costs have been funded from underspends elsewhere in the service budget. It is requested that the unspent budget is carried forward to finance additional costs anticipated in the next financial year related to the new contract.	33	0
Place Emptying Dog Bins in Green Spaces	15	0	(15)	The cost of emptying dog bins in parks and green spaces is now completely funded by contributions from the respective Parish Councils.	0	(15)
Place Green Space Maintenance Grants and Contributions Income	(20)	(80)	(60)	The overachievement of income relates to funding amounts received in prior years for specific projects and activities. As these projects have been completed and the funding conditions have been met, the income received has been charged to the General Fund.	0	0
Regulatory Town Wide Review	24	12	(12)	Request to carry forward the unspent budget to complete the Traffic Regulation Order Process following formal consultation on parking restriction options as part of the Royston Town wide review. This includes the publication of the orders and implementation of the restrictions on street.	12	0
Regulatory Air Quality New Burdens Grant from government	0	(12)	(12)	Grant was received from DEFRA at the end of March 2023 for managing and enforcing the enhanced Smoke Control Areas regulation. Work on this will happen in 2023/24, so it is requested to transfer the grant into an earmarked reserve to draw down in 2023/24.	0	0
Transfer to earmarked reserve	0	12	+12		0	0
Regulatory Ukrainian Housing Checks Grant Income	0	(72)	(72)	Grant was received from Herts County Council to contribute towards the costs of carrying out housing checks for Ukrainian refugees living with host families in the District. These checks were undertaken by the Environmental Health team without requiring additional budget. It is requested that the unspent grant money is transferred to an earmarked reserve to help manage staffing and workload pressures identified in next year, with back-dated work outstanding due to the impact of Covid or the Covid recovery requirements.	0	0
Transfer to earmarked reserve	0	72	+72		0	0

Budget Area	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k	Reason for difference	Carry Forward Request £k	Estimated Impact on 2023/24 £k
Regulatory Income from Parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)	(573)	(600)	(27)	Income from PCNs has continued to increase by more than the increase in car parking income.	0	0
Contribution to PCN bad debt provision	162	236	+74	A higher level of PCNs being issued, and non-payment of them, has meant that it has been necessary to write-off some of the amounts owed and also make an increased bad debt provision for those amounts where still seeking payment to be made. The Council actively chases all PCN debts, and write-off is a last resort.	0	0
Regulatory Princes Mews Car Park Management Fee income	(5)	(35)	(30)	Increase in income results from the negotiation of a new agreement with the landlord of the car park, following the vacation of Morrisons from the premises. As this contract ends in December 2023, no ongoing additional income is assumed.	0	0
Total of explained variances	**(3,065)**	**(3,828)**	**(763)**		180	(221)
Other minor balances	19,803	19,646	(157)		4	(10)
Overall Total	**16,738**	**15,818**	**(920)**		**184**	**(231)**

8.3. Cabinet are asked to approve the estimated impact on the 2023/24 budget, an overall decrease in budget of £47k (recommendation 2.3), which comprises;

- £184k of budget carry-forwards from 2022/23 to 2023/24 for projects that were not completed by the end of the financial year. These are shown in the penultimate column of table 4 above. This will take the total budget carried forward to £1.107million, after including those reported and approved at quarter 1, quarter 2, month 8 and quarter 3.
- £231k decrease in budget to reflect the estimated net impact in 2023/24 and beyond of variances identified at Outturn. These are shown in the final column of table 4 above

8.4. The original approved budget for 2022/23 (and therefore working budget) included efficiencies totalling £606k, which were agreed by Council in February 2022. At the end of the year a net total of £1,164k of efficiencies have been achieved in 2022/23. The forecast at the end of Quarter Three was a net overachievement of £1,046k. The increase of £116k since Quarter Three relates to:

- £101k overachievement of the Careline Service efficiency, mainly due to the non-complex needs installation and maintenance service being brought in-house, as highlighted and explained in table 4 above.
- Increase of £33k in the overachievement of forecast interest income from investment of surplus cash balances, as itemised in table four above.
- £18k underachievement of the revenue saving anticipated from capitalising the purchase of new bins. This reflects that we held a stock of bins at the start of the year, which were purchased as a revenue (rather than a capital) cost. As these are provided to residents the value of the original purchase is charged to the revenue budget. This is included in the 'other minor variances' total in table 4.

8.5. The working budget for 2022/23 includes budgets totalling £712k that were carried forward from the previous year. These are generally carried forward so that they can be spent for a particular purpose that had been due to happen in 2021/22 but was delayed into 2022/23. At Quarter Three, it was forecast that £363k of the total budget carried forward would not be spent in 2022/23. At the end of the year, £446k of the budget carried forward has not been spent. The £83k increase in the final quarter relates to the Strategic Priorities Fund, as explained in table 4 above.

8.6. Six corporate 'financial health' indicators have been identified in relation to key sources of income for the Council in 2022/23. Table 5 below shows the performance for the year. A comparison is made to the original budget to give the complete picture for the year. Each indicator is given a status of red, amber, or green. A green indicator means that income recorded matched or exceeded the budgeted level of income. A red indicator means that the outturn has not met the budgeted level of income. An amber indicator is only used during the year to highlight that there is a risk that the budgeted level of income may not be met.

8.7. At the end of the year, three of the indicators are green and three of the indicators are red. The summary indicators are therefore unchanged from that reported at Quarter Three.

Table 5 - Corporate financial health indicators

Indicator	Status	Original Budget £k	Outturn £k	Variance £k
Leisure Centres Management Fee	Red	(857)	(578)	279
Garden Waste Collection Service Subscriptions	Green	(1,139)	(1,251)	(112)
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service Income	Green	(1,113)	(1,142)	(29)
Planning Application Fees (including fees for pre-application advice)	Red	(1,006)	(735)	271
Car Parking Fees	Red	(1,999)	(1,761)	238
Parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)	Green	(573)	(600)	(27)

8.8. Table 6 below indicates activity levels, where these drive financial performance, and how these compare to the prior year to indicate the direction of current trends. As performance against the planning applications fee income budget is generally determined by the number of large applications resolved in the year (rather than the total number of applications received), and this distinction is not captured in the data available, this indicator is omitted from table 6.

Table 6 - Corporate financial health indicators – activity drivers

Indicator	Activity Measure	Performance 2022/23	Performance 2021/22	Percentage Movement	Direction of Trend
Leisure Centres Management Fee	Number of Leisure Centre visits	1,465,319	858,655	+70.7%	
Garden Waste Collection Service	Number of bin subscriptions	28,928	27,871	+3.8%	
Commercial Refuse & Recycling Service	Number of customers	1,012	1,044	-3.0%	
Car Parking Fees	Car park tickets sold / average ticket price sold	1,128,375 / £1.65	1,067,999 / £1.58	+5.7% / +4.4%	
Parking Penalty Charge Notices	Number of PCNs issued	13,775	14,098	-2.3%	

FUNDING, RISK AND GENERAL FUND BALANCE

8.9. The Council's revenue budget is funded primarily from Council Tax and Retained Business Rates income. The Council was notified by Central Government in February 2022 of the amount of New Homes Bonus, Lower Tier Services Grant and Services Grant it could expect to receive in 2022/23 and planned accordingly. In February 2023 the Government also announced the allocations for the distribution of the business rates levy account surplus to be received in 2022/23.

8.10. Council Tax and Business Rates are accounted for in the Collection Fund rather than directly in our accounts, as we also collect them on behalf of other bodies. Each organisation has a share of the balance on the Collection Fund account. The Council must repay in this year its share of the Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Fund deficits for the prior year, as estimated in January 2022. As reported previously, this has meant a contribution from the General Fund of £2k to the Council Tax Collection Fund and £5.345m to the Business Rates Collection Fund in 2022/23.

8.11. The Council's share of the Council Tax Collection Fund at the end of the year is a surplus balance of £116k. This represents a reduction of £22k on the forecast surplus of £138k estimated in January. The deterioration in the position in the final quarter will be incorporated in the calculation of the surplus/deficit position for 2023/24 and hence impact the level of Council Tax funding available in 2024/25. It is the forecast surplus amount of £138k that will be transferred from the Collection Fund to the General Fund in 2023/24 and therefore increase the amount of funding available, as was shown in Appendix C to the Revenue Budget 2023/24 report.

8.12. The Council's share of the Business Rates Collection Fund at the end of the year is a surplus balance of £1.729million. This represents an increase of £1.276million on the estimated surplus of £453k declared in the NNDR1 return submitted to Government in January. The increase in the surplus at the end of the year is primarily due to a reduction in the calculated provision required at the end of the year for the impact of business rates appeals. The reduction in the appeals provision follows the announcement from Government during the final quarter that the 31st March 2023 would be the deadline for businesses to submit appeals against the 2017 business rates listing. This has allowed the Council to release entirely the provision held for appeals not yet lodged against the 2017 listing, of which the Council's share was £1.3million at the end of the last financial year. This was not anticipated when the estimated surplus was prepared in January. As

explained in the report at quarter 3, it is the forecast surplus amount of £453k that will be transferred to the General Fund in the next financial year.

8.13. The Council is also subject to a business rates levy from Central Government as it collects more in business rates than the baseline need determined by Central Government. In 2022/23 the Council is a member of the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool with five other Hertfordshire Local Authorities. The Pool was formed with the expectation that this should reduce the business rates levy amount otherwise payable at the end of the year, referred to as the 'pooling gain', though this would be dependent on the actual level of rates collected across the Pool authorities. Based on draft business rate returns submitted to Government at the end of April, the Council has accrued an amount of £273k for the cost of the levy contribution for 2022/23. If the accrued amount is ultimately the final amount payable, this would represent a pooling gain of £638k on the £911k levy that would have been due to government if the Council was outside the business rates pool. The accrued levy contribution has been funded from the grant held in earmarked reserve and therefore has had a net zero impact on the General Fund balance at the end of the year.

8.14. The Council receives compensation in the form of a grant from Central Government for business rate reliefs introduced, which goes into our funds rather than the Collection Fund. The total grant amount receivable for 2022/23 was £4.457million, which included an amount of £279k received as compensation for the Government's decision to freeze the business rates multiplier for 2022/23. The multiplier compensation is included in the funding total in table 7 below, with the rest of the grant transferred to reserve to fund the repayment of business rate collection fund deficits recorded. Some of the amount held in reserve has therefore been used to fund the £5.345m deficit repayment required in this year and a further £3m has been used to top up the business rates income charged to the General Fund in 2022/23 to the baseline funding amount anticipated when the budget was set.

8.15. The Council did not receive non-ringfenced emergency grant funding from government in 2022/23 to help mitigate the ongoing financial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. As detailed in the 2022/23 Revenue Budget Report presented to Full Council in February 2022, a central provision of £1.740m was included in the budget for 2022/23. The budget provision was fully allocated, with £1.190m used to mitigate forecast adverse variances reported at Quarter One and a further £550k was unused. The experience in this year was used to refine the central provision amount required for 2023/24, as detailed in the Revenue Budget 2023/24 report.

8.16. Table 7 below summarises the impact on the General Fund balance of the outturn position detailed in this report. It should be noted however that the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 is yet to be audited and changes to the General Fund balance may arise as a result of the final accounts audit

Table 7 – General Fund impact

	Working Budget £k	Outturn £k	Difference £k
Brought Forward balance (1st April 2022)	**(10,607)**	**(10,607)**	**-**
Net Expenditure	16,738	15,818	(920)
Funding (Council Tax, Business Rates, NHB, Lower Tier Services Grant, 2022/23 Services Grant, Business Rates Levy Surplus)	(15,843)	(15,843)	0
Release of the balance held in the earmarked Special Reserve	(640)	(640)	0
Release of Cemetery Mausoleum earmarked reserve	(175)	(175)	0
Contribution to Collection Fund	5,345	5,345	0
Funding from Reserves (including Business Rate Relief Grant)	(5,888)	(5,888)	0
Carried Forward balance (31st March 2023)	**(11,070)**	**(11,990)**	**(920)**

8.17. The minimum level of General Fund balance is determined based on known and unknown risks. Known risks are those things that we think could happen and we can forecast both a potential cost if they happen, and percentage likelihood. The notional amount is based on multiplying the cost by the potential likelihood. The notional amount for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure. There is not an actual budget set aside for either of these risk types so, when they occur, they are reflected as budget variances (see table 3). We monitor the level of known risks that actually happen, as it highlights whether there might be further variances. This would be likely if a number of risks come to fruition during the early part of the year. We also use this monitoring to inform the assessment of risks in future years. The notional amount calculated at the start of the year for known risks was £1,808k, and at the end of the year a total of £433k has come to fruition. The identified risk realised in the final quarter relates to:

- Increase in external audit fees exceeding the amount of additional related government grant funding; £4k (as highlighted in table 4 above)

Table 8 – Known financial risks

	£'000
Original allowance for known financial risks	**1,808**
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 1	(41)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 2	(303)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 3	(85)
Known financial risks realised in Quarter 4	(4)
Remaining allowance for known financial risks	**1,375**

EARMARKED RESERVES

8.18. The Council has a number of earmarked reserves, which have been used to fund revenue expenditure during the year. These are detailed in Table 9 below. A total of £5.331 million has been contributed to the reserves in 2022/23 and a total of £10.605million has been transferred out of the reserves to the General Fund.

Table 9 – Earmarked Reserves

	Balance at 1 April 2021	Contributions to reserve	Transfers out of reserves	Balance at 31 March 2022
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Cemetery Mausoleum Reserve	175	0	(175)	0
Childrens Services Reserve	46	1	0	47
Churchgate Development Reserve	0	138	0	138
Climate Change Grant Reserve	21	0	(2)	19
DLUHC Grants Reserve	9,367	4,198	(9,211)	4,354
Elections Admin Grant Reserve	0	19	0	19
Environmental Health Grants Reserve	0	84	0	84
Growth Area Fund Reserve	32	5	(13)	24
Homelessness Grants Reserve	502	0	(150)	352
Housing & Planning Delivery Reserve	1,016	34	(163)	887
Information Technology Reserve	23	0	0	23
Insurance Reserve	34	0	0	34
Land Charges Reserve	36	0	(24)	12
Leisure Management Maintenance Reserve	68	0	0	68
Museum Exhibits Reserve	14	0	0	14
Neighbourhood Plan Reserve	120	0	(5)	115
Paintings Conservation Reserve	11	0	0	11
Shared Prosperity Fund Grant Reserve	0	17	0	17
Special Reserve	640	0	(640)	0
Street Name Plates	16	0	0	16
Syrian Refugee Project	566	61	(8)	619
Taxi Licences Reserve	7	4	0	11
Town Centre Maintenance	69	8	0	77
Traffic Regulation Orders	381	0	(5)	376
Waste Reserve	836	0	0	836
Waste Vehicles Reserve	1,341	509	0	1,850
Welfare Reform Grants Reserve	614	253	(209)	658
Total Revenue Reserves	**15,935**	**5,331**	**(10,605)**	**10,661**

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Cabinet has a responsibility to keep under review the budget of the Council and any other matter having substantial implications for the financial resources of the Council. Specifically, 5.7.8 of Cabinet's terms of reference state that it has remit "*to monitor quarterly revenue expenditure and agree adjustments within the overall budgetary framework"*. By considering monitoring reports throughout the financial year Cabinet is able to make informed recommendations on the budget to Council. The Council is under a duty to maintain a balanced budget and to maintain a prudent balance of reserves.

9.2. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require that the Annual Statement of Accounts be approved and published.

9.3. The requirement for financial reserves is acknowledged in statute. Sections 31A, 32 42A and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require billing and precepting authorities in England and Wales to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement.

9.4. The Council must ensure sufficient flexibility to avoid going into deficit at any point during the financial year. The Chief Financial Officer is required to report on the robustness of the proposed financial reserves, under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003.

9.5. Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires every local authority to make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs. The level of the general reserve is a matter for the Council to determine having had regard to the advice of the S151 Officer.

9.6. This is a requirement of the Council Procedure Rules as set out in Part 4.4.1 (b) and 4.4.1 (k) of the Council's Constitution.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Members have been advised of any variations from the budgets in the body of this report and of any action taken by officers.

10.2. The General Fund balance of £11.990million (table 7) meets the recommended minimum balance of General Fund reserves agreed when the budget was set. The Statement of Accounts is however yet to be audited and changes to the General Fund balance may arise as a result of the final audit. As the Housing Benefit claim is also yet to be audited, the relevant values included in the reported outturn are based on un-audited figures.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. As outlined in the body of the report. The process of quarterly monitoring to Cabinet is a control mechanism to help to mitigate the risk of unplanned overspending of the overall Council budget.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. For any individual new revenue investment proposal of £50k or more, or affecting more than two wards, a brief equality analysis is required to be carried out to demonstrate that the authority has taken full account of any negative, or positive, equalities implications; this will take place following agreement of the investment.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1. Although there are no direct human resource implications at this stage, care is taken to ensure that where efficiency proposals or service reviews may affect staff, appropriate communication and consultation is provided in line with HR policy.

16. APPENDICES

16.1. Appendix A - 2022/23 Significant Revenue Budget Variances

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1. None.

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Appendix A - 2022/23 Significant Revenue Budget Variances

Directorate	Significant Service Area Variances	Net Original Direct Budget	Net Direct Outturn	(Under) / Overspend	Summary Explanation	Relevant Report
Managing Director	Treasury Investments Interest Income	(119)	(1,310)	(1,191)	Increase primarily due to the changes to the Bank of England base rate. Original budget based on bank rate of 0.25% at the start of 2022, increased incrementally to 4.25% by the end of the financial year.	Q1, Q2, Q3 & Outturn 2022/23
	Covid-19 Central Provision	1,740	0	(1,740)	Contingency budget mitigated impact on General Fund of around £1.2m of Covid impacts identified, including the leisure, parking and AFM income shortfalls itemised below. Approximately £0.5m was not required.	Q1 & Q3 2022/23
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	1,801	1,560	(241)		
	Directorate Total	**3,422**	**250**	**(3,172)**		
Customers Directorate	Customers Directorate Staffing Costs	3,658	3,847	189	The pay award for 2022/23 was an increase of £1,925 to every pay point. The assumption in the original budget for 2022/23 was a pay offer of 2%.	Q1 2022/23
	Net Housing Benefit Expenditure	324	479	155	Shortfall in Housing Benefit subsidy income primarily due to housing benefit payments in respect of temporary accommodation not being eligible for full reimbursement through the subsidy.	Q1 & Outturn 2022/23
	Housing Benefit Overpayments Income - Contribution to bad debt provision	300	28	(272)	Relatively lower levels of overpayments raised in recent years, combined with a higher proportion of debt successfully collected, have reduced total amount of debt outstanding. This has reduced the level of bad debt provision required at year end and hence reduced the contribution needed from the General Fund.	Outturn 2022/23
	Careline Installation and Maintenance	300	116	(184)	The non-complex needs installation and maintenance service was brought in-house part way through the year, resulting in a saving compared to outsourced contract.	Outturn 2022/23
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	(716)	(664)	52		
	Directorate Total	**3,866**	**3,806**	**(60)**		
Enterprise Directorate	Commercial Property Income	(1,335)	(1,471)	(136)	Conclusion in this financial year of two rent reviews that had been ongoing for some time. Outturn includes the back-rent due.	Q1 2022/23
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	1,187	1,173	(14)		
	Directorate Total	**(148)**	**(298)**	**(150)**		
Legal & Community Directorate	**Directorate Total (all budgets have variances under £100k)**	**2,281**	**2,395**	**114**		
Place Directorate	Domestic Waste & Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract Expenditure	5,594	5,945	351	The budget for 22/23 assumed a contract indexation of 3.7%, based on the respective indices at that time. Subsequent increase in inflation indices resulted in actual indexation rate for 22/23 of 9.9%.	Q1 2022/23
	AFM Income	(421)	(125)	296	Greater levels of residual waste generated across Hertfordshire increased the overall costs of disposal incurred by HCC and reduced the total AFM amount shared with collection authorities.	Q1 2022/23
	Leisure Centre Management Contracts Fee Income	(857)	(578)	279	Increase in income compared to prior year indicative of continued recovery in usage through the year. Additional income from growth in demand partly offset by cost pressures.	Q1,Q2 & Outturn 2022/23
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	404	362	(42)		
	Directorate Total	**4,720**	**5,604**	**884**		
Regulatory Services Directorate	Supplementary Planning Documents	167	0	(167)	The new Local Plan was subject to significant delays before being adopted in November 2022. A programme of work for the supporting SPDs is now being prepared.	Month 8 2022/23
	Planning Applications Income	(1,006)	(735)	271	Introduction of masterplanning procedures displaced pre-application income on large schemes. General slowdown in the construction sector as a result of economic uncertainty.	Q2 2022/23
	Car Parking Fees Income	(1,999)	(1,761)	238	Income receipts at approximately 90% of the level observed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Plateau in recovery indicative of one or both of; a long-term shift to working from home; the increase in the cost-of-living deterring journeys into town centres for leisure activities and shopping.	Q1 2022/23
	Car Parking Season Tickets Income	(320)	(183)	137	Income shortfall attributed to greater levels of home working adopted in response to the pandemic.	Q1 & Q3 2022/23
	Other budgets with variances under £100k	4,565	4,255	(310)		
	Directorate Total	**1,407**	**1,576**	**169**		
Resources Directorate	**Directorate Total (all budgets have variances under £100k)**	**2,650**	**2,485**	**(165)**		
OVERALL TOTAL		**18,198**	**15,818**	**(2,380)**		

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CABINET
27 June 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: INVESTMENT STRATEGY (CAPITAL AND TREASURY) END OF YEAR REVIEW 2022/23

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FINANCE AND I.T.

COUNCIL PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 As at the end of financial year 2022/23, there is a reduction in Capital spend compared to quarter 3 of **£1.447million**. The majority of this change is due to revisions to the profile of planned project spend, with **£1.222million** that will now instead be incurred in 2023/24.

1.2 During the year the Council has generated **£1.310million** of interest from its investments. This is more than the budgeted total of £1.277million at Quarter 3, and significantly more than the original budget of £0.119million.

1.3 The Council has repaid £0.019million of borrowing during the year as it has matured. The Council has £0.367million of remaining borrowing. This borrowing is at a fixed rate for a fixed period. The premium incurred from repaying this borrowing early means that it is not worthwhile to do so.

1.4 The Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements throughout the year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet notes expenditure of £6.923million in 2022/23 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

2.2 That Cabinet approves the adjustments to the capital programme for 2023/24 as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2, increasing the estimated spend in by £1.222million.

2.3 That Cabinet notes the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.7 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

2.4 That Cabinet approves the application of £6.300million of capital receipts/set aside towards the 2022/23 capital programme, paragraph 8.7 refers.

2.5 Cabinet is asked to note the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of March 2023.

2.6 Cabinet is asked to recommend this report to Council and ask Council to:

1) Approve the actual 2022/23 prudential and treasury indicators.
2) Note the annual Treasury Report for 2022/23.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

3.2 To ensure the Council's continued compliance with CIPFA's code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Options for capital investment are considered as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

4.2 The primary principles governing the Council's investment criteria are the security of its investments (ensuring that it gets the capital invested back) and liquidity of investments (being able to get the funds back when needed). After this the return (or yield) is then considered, which provides an income source for the Council. In relation to this the Council could take a different view on its appetite for risk, which would be reflected in the Investment Strategy. In general, greater returns can be achieved by taking on greater risk. Once the Strategy has been set for the year, there is limited scope for alternative options as Officers will seek the best return that is in accordance with the Investment Strategy.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Consultation on the capital expenditure report is not required. Members will be aware that consultation is incorporated into project plans of individual capital schemes as they are progressed.

5.2 There are regular meetings with Treasury advisors (Link).

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 21st April 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 In February 2022, Council approved the Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy for 2022/23 to 2031/32.

7.2 The Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2022 to 2027 confirmed that the Council will seek opportunities to utilise capital funding (including set aside receipts) for 'invest to save' schemes and proposals that generate higher rates of return than standard treasury investments. This is one way the Council will allocate resources to support organisational transformation that will reduce revenue expenditure.

7.3 Link Asset Services Ltd were first contracted to provide Treasury advice for the financial year 2012/13 and this arrangement has been extended until 2022/23. The service includes:

- Regular updates on economic and political changes which may impact on the Council's borrowing and investment strategies
- Information on investment counterparty creditworthiness
- Technical updates
- Access to a Technical Advisory Group.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council has £124.5 million of capital assets that it currently owns (as at 31 March 2023). This has increased from £121.0 million as at 31 March 2022. The Investment Strategy set out the reasons for owning assets that are not for service delivery, including an assessment of Security, Liquidity, Yield and Fair Value. The significant change to this during 2022/23 was the acquisition of the leasehold of the Churchgate shopping centre in Hitchin. This was assessed as part of the 2023/33 Investment Strategy.

Capital Programme 2022/23

8.2 The full capital programme is detailed in Appendix A and shows the revised costs to date, together with the actual spend from 2022/23 to 2032/33 and the funding source for each capital scheme.

8.3 The Outturn Capital expenditure for 2022/23 is **£6.923million**. This is a reduction of **£1.447million** on that reported at the end of the third quarter. The decrease in spend is largely due to re-profiling spend into future years. Table 1 below details the changes from what was reported at Quarter 3.

Table 1- Current Capital Estimates

	2022/23 £M	2023/24 £M	2024/25 to 2032/33 £M
Original Estimates approved by Full Council February 2022	**7.546**	**5.522**	**17.311**
Changes approved by Cabinet in 3rd Qrt 2021/22	0.821	0	0
Changes approved by Cabinet in 2021/22 Capital Outturn report	0.980	0	0
Revised Capital estimates at start of 2022/23	**9.347**	**5.522**	**17.311**
Full Council approved additional Expenditure – Acquisition of Churchgate	4.350	0	0
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure – Installation of Electric Charging Points at DCO	0.015	0	0
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure – Shared Prosperity Fund Interventions (two separate projects at £50k and £10k each)	0.060	0	0
Changes at Q1	-1.520	2.048	0
Full Council approved additional Expenditure – NHLC Soft Play	**0.250**	**-0.100**	**0**
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure - Gum Gun	**0.038**	**0**	**0**
Changes at Q2	**-2.725**	**0.861**	**2.000**
Full Council 23/24 Budget	**0.045**	**0.184**	**3.740**
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure – Bancroft Café Kiosk	**0.020**	**0**	**0**
Executive Member – Finance and I.T. approved additional Expenditure – Careline Laptops	**0.030**	**0**	**0**
Changes at Q3	**-1.540**	**1.554**	**0**
Changes since Q3 (as detailed in this report)	**-1.447**	**1.222**	
Outturn 2022/23	**6.923**	**11.291**	**23.051**

8.4 Table 2 lists the schemes in the 2022/23 Capital Programme that will start or continue in 2023/24:

Table 2: Scheme Timetable Revision:
(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2022/23 Working Budget £'000	2022/22 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2023/24 onwards £'000
Property Improvements	300	119	-181	The underspend is due to: 1) Some works identified by previous surveys as being required in the future have found not to be necessary by our Building Surveyor when they have been reassessed. 2) Some works do not meet the criteria to be capitalised and consequently are funded through the revenue budget. 3) The precise long-term future of some buildings needs to be resolved, and it is not prudent for some works to take place until that happens. 4) Works to re-roof a flat roof at Hitchin Outdoor pool were put back to ensure better weather conditions for the type of works being undertaken.	181
Environmental Improvements	187	40	-148	Quotations and works still being carried out for individual project items	148
Community Facilities Refurbishment	194	100	-94	All the capital funding has been allocated but not drawn down by the applicants. The funding will be paid when the various criteria of each award are met	94
Home Repair Assistance	120	32	-88	Due to ongoing staffing issues and the confusion over the introduction by the Government of other home improvement targeted grants schemes, there has been a reduction in the demand for assistance. During 2023/24,	88

Scheme	2022/23 Working Budget £'000	2022/22 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2023/24 onwards £'000
				it is hoped to again raise the profile of this grant scheme and signpost more people towards this assistance	
NHLC Soft Play	288	202	-86	Works complete April 23	86
Playground Renovation – District Wide 22/23	194	111	-83	Works delayed due to supply issues - works currently in progress at Smithson's Rec and are due for completion in June.	83
Thomas Bellamy House Structure	65	1	-64	Procurement of a contractor to undertake the proposed project has been delayed due to other projects having a higher priority. Two tenders have recently been received and the project is now likely to be undertaken in the 2023-24.	64
Shared Prosperity Fund	60	0	-60	This funding is for outdoor gym equipment in Royston. The equipment has been ordered and will be installed by the end of June. The delay was due to the late agreement by Government of our SPF plan, and the lead-time for equipment. The budget in 2023/24 will cover outdoor gym equipment in our other towns.	60
Leisure Condition Survey	59	0	-59	Roof repairs at Letchworth Outdoor Pool - works commenced in April but have paused until the pool closes in September.	59
Upgrade 25 Parking Machines	56	0	-56	Project to be reviewed subject to outcome of Alternative Methods of Payment Review to be progressed in 2023-24 which will include the upgrade and replacement of pay & display machines across the car parks over a 2 year period.	56
Riverside walkway Biggin Lane	53	0	-53	Agreements not in place to permit project to proceed just	53

Scheme	2022/23 Working Budget £'000	2022/22 Outturn £'000	Difference £'000	Reason for Difference	Estimated impact on 2023/24 onwards £'000
				yet. Working to progress the legal issues and permissions to deliver the project.	
Bury Mead Road Transfer Facility	30	0	-30	Plans to design the proposed facility upgrades are still under negotiation with the tenant of the site and with Hertfordshire County Council who are a major stakeholder in the site. It is expected the plans will be finalised in 2023-24 and the budget spent in the same period.	30
Infrastructure Hardware	28	0	-28	Staff vacancies have meant resources were not available to complete tasks within the financial year	28
Howard Gardens Splashpad	35	5	-30	The original budget allowed for replacement of the filter vessels due to their construction being fibreglass. However, our contractors were able to remove the old filter medium and replaced it with new without damaging the filter vessels themselves – resulting in an underspend. Work was undertaken in preparation for the 23/24 season which meant that it over ran into the current financial year and are now complete.	17
Total Minor (under £25k) slippage on other projects	285	107	-178		175
Total Revision to Budget Profile			**-1.238**		**1.222**

8.5 There are also changes to the overall costs of schemes in 2022/23. These changes total a net decrease of £0.225million and are detailed in Table3.

Table 3: Changes to Capital Schemes Commencing in 2022/23:
(Key: - = reduction in capital expenditure, + = increase in capital expenditure)

Scheme	2022/23 Working Budget £'000	2022/23 Spend £'000	Difference £'000	Comments
Park Homes Insulation	341	243	-98	This was a grant funded scheme with any unspent funds to be returned. In addition to the £243K Capital spend there were £38K of Revenue costs funded from the £341K budget. The remaining £60K was returned to Government when the scheme closed.
Replacement Flood lights St Mary's	60	0	-60	Lighting repair works have been completed which restored lighting to St Mary's car park without the need to draw on this budget. A future upgrading scheme may be considered once the full extent of the Churchgate regeneration works are established.
Microsoft Enterprise Agreement	617	560	-57	Fluctuations in software costs resulted in the contract being cheaper than originally estimated a year ago.
Other minor changes			**-10**	
Total revision to scheme spend			**-225**	

8.6 The following capital schemes have been completed during 2022/23:

- Completion of all remaining works on the Playground Renovation projects for 21/22
- Gt Ashby District Park Safety
- Ramsoms Recreation Ground Footpaths and Gates
- Icknield Way Cemetery Paths
- Purchase of the Gum Cleaning Machine
- Centros Integra Upgrade
- Churchgate Acquisition
- NHLC Sauna Steam Refurbishment
- Hitchin Swim Centre Outdoor Boiler Replacement
- Letchworth Outdoor Pool Boiler
- Replace Hot Water Calorifier at Hitchin Swim Centre
- Bancroft Kiosk
- Sprung Floor at Hitchin Town Hall
- Park Homes Insulation

Capital Programme 2022/23 Funding onwards

8.7 Table 4 below shows how the Council have funded the 2022/23 capital programme.

Table 4: Funding the Capital Programme:

	2022/23 Balance at start of year £M	2022/23 Additions £M	2022/23 Funding Used £M	2022/23 Balance at end of year £M
Useable Capital Receipts and Set-aside Receipts	7.643	4.209	(6.300)	5.552
S106 receipts			(0.316)	
Other third party grants and contributions			(0.306)	
Revenue Contributions / IT Reserve			(0.001)	
Planned Borrowing			0	
Total			**(6.923)**	

8.8 The availability of third party contributions and grants to fund capital investment is continuously sought in order to reduce pressure on the Council's available capital receipts and allow for further investment. Additional capital receipts are dependent on selling surplus land and buildings. Ensuring that the Council gets best value from the disposal of land and buildings can take a long time and therefore the amounts that might be received could be subject to change.

8.9 The Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) at 31st March 2023 was negative £2.719 million (negative £4.45 million 31st March 2022). As the CFR is negative the Council does not have a need to borrow to fund capital spend. However, should the Capital programme be fully spent in 23/24 and 24/25 there will be a potential need to borrow £1.0M, which will have an impact on the General Fund by way of a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and interest payments.

Treasury Management 2022/23

8.10 The Council has operated both within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and in compliance with the Treasury Management Practices.

8.11 The Council generated £1.310M of interest during 2022/23. The average interest rate agreed on new deals during the year was 2.89%. The average interest rate on all outstanding investments at the 31st March was 4.19%.

8.12 The Council's activities expose it to a variety of risks (credit, liquidity and market). The Treasury Strategy sets out the Authority's appetite for the level of exposure to these risks.

8.13 **Security Risk** – The possibility that other parties fail to pay amounts due to the Authority.

The Council's counterparty list for 2022/23 comprised UK building societies and UK banks with a Fitch (a credit rating agency) credit rating greater than BBB, non-UK banks with a credit rating greater than AA- with a AAA Country rating, other Local Authorities and Public Corporations. It also includes smaller Building Societies that do not have a credit rating.

8.14 **Liquidity Risk** – the possibility that the Authority may not have funds available to meet its commitments to make payments.

8.15 **Market Risk** - the possibility that financial loss might arise as a result of changes in interest rates.

Investing long term (greater than one year) currently achieves higher interest rates than short term deals. The risks of long term deals are:

(i) The longer the time period the longer the investment is exposed to default.
(ii) If the investment has a fixed interest rate, interest rates could rise and the potential to invest at a higher rate will be lost until the investment matures.

8.16 Members have indicated that they are prepared to accept this risk within the limits expressed in the Treasury Strategy, which allows no more than £18M of outstanding investments to be invested for longer than 365 days at any one time. At the end of the year the Council had one investment for £2M invested for longer than 365 days (commencing 20/03/23). This reflects that interest rates have continued to rise during the year and not wanting to lock in to a longer term fixed rate that was too low.

8.17 **Interest (Yield)** – The Bank of England increased Bank Rate eight times during 2022/23 starting the year at 0.75% and ending at 4.25%. With investments being kept relatively short the yield on investments increased as the year went on. £1.310million of interest was received during the year compared to £0.075million in 2021/22.

8.18 The investments outstanding at the 31 March 2023 were £50.5million. This compares to a balance of £57.5million at 31 March 2022. Investment in capital projects will continue during 2023/24 and the estimated investment interest for 2023/24 was set at £1.602million. This estimate will be revised in the 1st quarter monitoring report due to the recent increases to Bank Rate and a higher level of balances available to invest due to capital slippage.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference under 5.6.7 specifically includes "to monitor expenditure on the capital programme and agree adjustments within the overall budgetary framework". The Cabinet also has a responsibility to keep under review the budget of the Council and any other matter having substantial implications for the financial resources of the Council. By considering monitoring reports throughout the financial year Cabinet is able to make informed recommendations on the budget to Council. The Council is under a duty to maintain a balanced budget.

9.2 Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 states that:
"every local authority shall make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs and shall secure that one of their officers has responsibility for the administration of those affairs."

9.3 Asset disposals must be handled in accordance with the Council's Contract Procurement Rules.

9.4 The Prudential Indicators comply with the Local Government Act 2003.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The main financial implications are covered in section 8 of the report.

10.2 The Authority operates a tolerance limit on capital projects that depends on the value of the scheme and on this basis over the next ten-year programme it should be anticipated that the total spend over the period could be £3.735million higher than the budgeted £34.342million.

10.3 The capital programme will need to remain under close review due to the limited availability of capital resources and the affordability in the general fund of the cost of using the Council's capital receipts. When capital receipts are used and not replaced the availability of cash for investment reduces. Consequently interest income from investments reduces. £1.0million currently earns the Authority approximately £45k per year in interest (4.5%). The general fund estimates are routinely updated to reflect the reduced income from investments. When the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) reaches zero the Council will need to start charging a minimum revenue provision to the general fund for the cost of capital and will need to consider external borrowing for further capital spend. The CFR at the 31 March 2023 was negative £2.719million. This may turn positive in 24/25 if the capital programme is fully spent.

10.4 The Council also aims to ensure that the level of planned capital spending in any one year matches the capacity of the organisation to deliver the schemes to ensure that the impact on the revenue budget of loss of cash-flow investment income is minimised.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The inherent risks in undertaking a capital project are managed by the project manager of each individual scheme. These are recorded on a project risk log which will be considered by the Project Board (if applicable). The key risks arising from the project may be recorded on Pentana (the Council's Performance & Risk management software).

11.2 Risks associated with treasury management and procedures to minimise risk are outlined in the Treasury Management Practices document, TMP1, which was adopted by Cabinet in July 2003 and is revisited annually as part of the Treasury Strategy review. The risk on the General Fund of a fall of investment interest below the budgeted level is dependent on banks and building societies need for borrowing.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 There are no direct equalities implications directly arising from the adoption of the Capital Programme for 2022/23 onwards. For any individual new capital investment proposal of £50k or more, or affecting more than two wards, an equality analysis is required to be carried out. This will take place following agreement of the investment proposal.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to recommendations of this report. The projects at section 8.4 may have impacts that contribute to an adverse impact. As these projects go forward, an assessment will be made where necessary.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no direct human resource implications.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A, Capital Programme Detail including Funding 2022/23 onwards.
Appendix B, Treasury Management Update.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Investment Strategy (Integrated Capital and Treasury Strategy)
https://srvmodgov01.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s18463/INVESTMENT%20STRATEGY%20INTEGRATED%20CAPITAL%20AND%20TREASURY.pdf
https://srvmodgov01.north-herts.gov.uk/documents/s18464/Final2%20Cabinet%20Appendix%20A-%20Integrated%20Capital%20and%20Treasury%20Strategy.docx.pdf

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		Spend / Forecast Spend							Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2022/23 Funding £	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 - 2032/33 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set-aside receipts/ Borrowing
40 KVA UPS Device or Battery Replacement	Customers	16,500	12,000	0	14,000	0	0	16,000	0	0	0	0	58,500
Access Burymean Road	Enterprise	500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	500
Acquisition of Churchgate	Enterprise	4,220,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,220,200
Alternative to safeword tokens for staff/members working remotely	Customers	0	6,900	3,000	0	3,000	0	19,000	0	0	0	0	31,900
Avenue Park Floodlights	Place	0	14,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14,000
Avenue Park Splash Park	Place	0	70,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
Back-up Diesel 40 KVA Generator (DCO)	Customers	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Baldock Town Hall project	Legal and Community	1,500	4,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5,600
Bancroft & Priory Splash Pads	Place	0	0	35,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	35,000
Bancroft Cafe Kiosk	Enterprise	20,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,600
Bancroft Lighting	Place	0	45,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45,000
BEIS Park Homes Insulation	Regulatory	242,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	242,900	0	0	0
Burymead Road Transfer Facility	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Cabinet Switches - 4 Floors	Customers	0	18,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18,000
Cadcorp Local Knowledge & Notice Board Software	Customers	0	5,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200	5,200
Careline Laptops	Customers	24,900	5,100	0	0	0	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0
Careline Servers	Customers	0	3,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,800
CCTV - DCO & Hitchin Town Hall	Customers	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
CCTV Replacement	Customers	0	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	150,000
Charnwood House	Enterprise	0	50,000	350,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	400,000
Conference Calling Solutions in Large Meeting Rooms at District Council Offices	Customers	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Council property improvements following condition surveys	Resources	118,700	485,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	603,700
Cyber Attacks - Events Monitoring Software Solution	Customers	7,100	2,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,100
Cycle Strategy implementation (GAF)	Regulatory	0	278,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	278,000	0	0	0
Data Switch Upgrade	Customers	0	15,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,000
DCO Electric Vehicle Charges	Resources	16,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16,100
Disabled Facilities Grant	Regulatory	-7,600											-7,600
DR Hardware Refresh Inc UPS Battery Pk (unit 3)	Customers	0	0	0	55,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,000
Email Encryption Software Solution	Customers	20,000	20,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,400
Enhancements to Hitchin Swim Centre facility	Place	0	65,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65,000
Environmental Improvements	Place	40,200	147,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	187,500
Former Public Convenience Portmill Lane	Enterprise	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Great Ashby District Park safety and security	Place	25,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,800
Green Infrastructure implementation (GAF)	Regulatory	0	185,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	185,000	0	0	0
Grounds Maintenance Vehicles & Machinery	Resources	0	315,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	315,000
Gum Gun	Place	39,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	38,000	0	1,200	0
Hitchin Lairage car park - cosmetic coating to four stairwells and replacement windows and doors	Resources	0	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Boiler Replacement	Place	0	0	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Outdoor Pool Boiler Replacement	Place	53,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53,500
Hitchin Swim Centre Outdoor Pool Cover Replacement	Place	0	0	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000

		Spend / Forecast Spend							Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2022/23 Funding £	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 - 2032/33 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set-aside receipts/ Borrowing
Hitchin Swim Centre Reception Toilet Refurbishment	Place	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Hitchin Swim Centre Replacement of Domestic Hot Water Calorifer	Place	15,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15,900
Hitchin Swim Centre: Archers Member Change and Relaxation Area Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Changing Village Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	0	225,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	225,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Fitness Equipment Replacement	Place	0	0	0	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000
Hitchin Swim Centre: Fitness Facility Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000
Hitchin Town Hall Sprung Floor Replacement	Enterprise	14,100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14,100
Howard Gardens Splashpad	Place	4,700	17,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22,100
Howard Park Letchworth Path Resurfacing	Place	0	10,000	10,000	0	10,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Ickneild Way Cemetery Footpaths	Place	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000
Icknield Way Cemetery Letchworth Road and Path Resurfacing	Place	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Infrastructure Hardware	Customers	0	28,000	314,000	0	18,000	18,000	190,000	0	0	0	0	568,000
Installation of trial on-street charging (GAF)	Regulatory	0	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0
Integrated Centros Upgrade	Resources	51,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	51,000
Ivel Springs Footpaths	Place	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
John Barker Place, Hitchin	Regulatory	0	1,096,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	270,400	0	825,600
Lairage Multi-Storey Car Par - Structural wall repairs	Resources	0	113,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	113,900
Laptops - Refresh Programme	Customers	40,700	43,700	40,000	319,000	49,000	35,000	483,000	0	0	0	0	1,010,400
Leased Cars	Resources	0	141,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	141,000
Leisure Condition Survey Enhancements	Place	0	58,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58,800
Letchworth Multi-storey Car Park - parapet walls, soffit & decoration	Resources	0	129,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	129,000
Letchworth Outdoor Pool Boiler Replacement	Place	55,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55,500
Local Authority Housing Fund	Resources	0	543,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	543,000	0	0	0
Match funding for Electric Vehicle charging	Regulatory	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Members Laptops Refresh Programme	Customers	0	30,000	0	0	30,000	0	60,000	0	0	0	0	120,000
Microsoft Enterprise Software Assurance	Customers	560,400	0	0	679,000	0	0	1,494,000	0	0	0	0	2,733,400
Mrs Howard Hall Replacement Boiler & Windows	Resources	0	63,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	63,000
Museum Storage Facility	Enterprise	0	2,000,000	2,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,000,000
Newmarket Road Royston Skatepark & Access	Place	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100,000	0	0
NH Museum & Community Facility	Enterprise	0	48,300	0	0	0	0	0	48,300	0	0	0	0
NHLC Boiler Replacement	Place	0	0	200,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	200,000
NHLC Gym toilets and accessible toilet refurbishment	Place	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
NHLC Interactive Water Feature	Place	0	0	0	0	0	120,000	0	0	0	0	0	120,000
NHLC Pool Flume Replacement	Place	0	0	0	0	0	0	150,000	0	0	0	0	150,000
NHLC reconfiguration of reception area	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
NHLC Sauna Steam Refurbishment	Place	164,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	164,900
NHLC Soft Play	Place	202,100	85,900	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	288,000
Northern Transfer Station	Place	0	0	3,000,000	3,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,000,000
Norton Common Footpaths	Place	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000

		Spend / Forecast Spend							Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2022/23 Funding £	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 - 2032/33 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set-aside receipts/ Borrowing
Norton Common Letchworth Tennis Courts	Place	0	25,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25,000
Off Street Car Parks resurfacing and enhancement	Resources	8,100	209,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	217,500
Oughtonhead Common Footpaths	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Oughtonhead Common Hitchin Weir	Place	0	400,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	400,000
Oughtonhead Common Signage and Interpretation	Place	0	10,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10,000
Parking Charging, Payments & Management	Regulatory	0	235,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	235,000
Parking Machines Replacement	Regulatory	0	150,000	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300,000
Parking Machines Upgrade - Contactless Payment Facility Installation	Regulatory	0	56,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	42,000	0	0	14,000
PC's - Refresh Programme	Customers	0	16,300	13,000	7,000	8,000	5,000	21,000	0	0	0	0	70,300
Playground Renovation District Wide	Place	344,500	262,500	180,000	180,000	180,000	180,000	900,000	0	0	81,100	0	2,145,900
Private Sector Grants	Regulatory	31,500	148,100	60,000	60,000	60,000	60,000	180,000	0	0	0	0	599,600
Provide housing at market rents.	Enterprise	49,200	2,500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	51,700
Ransoms Rec Footpaths, Gates and Railing	Place	7,900	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27,900
Refurbishment and improvement of community facilities	Legal and Community	100,000	93,800	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	193,800
Refurbishment of lifts at Lairage Car Park	Resources	-1,700	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1,700
Refuse and Recycling Bins	Place	118,400	135,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	90,000	360,000	0	0	0	0	973,400
Remote testing equipment - Emergency Lights and Water Temperature Monitoring	Resources	0	0	13,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13,000
Renovate play area Howard Park, Letchworth	Place	1,800	4,600	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,400
Renovate skate park at KGV Hitchin	Place	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000
Replace and enhance lighting at St Mary's Car Park	Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Replace items of play equipment Holroyd Cres, Baldock	Place	300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300
Replace items of play equipment Wilbury Recreation Ground, Letchworth	Place	300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	300
Replacement of Newark Close, Royston	Enterprise	0	65,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65,000
Replacement of the timber access bridge at Norton Common	Place	0	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Resurface Lairage Car Park	Resources	3,700	346,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	350,000
Riverside walkway, Biggin Lane	Place	0	53,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	53,000
RLC change village refurbishment – replacement of cubicles, lockers, vanity area and group change.	Place	0	0	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	150,000
RLC swim showers and change village toilet refurbishment	Place	0	75,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Royston Leisure Centre Boiler Replacement	Place	0	0	0	0	0	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	100,000
Royston Leisure Centre Changing Village Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Royston Leisure Centre Dry Side Toilet Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Royston Leisure Centre extension	Place	0	0	0	1,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	168,000	0	832,000
Royston Leisure Centre Fitness Equipment Replacement	Place	0	0	0	0	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	150,000
Royston Leisure Centre Fitness Facility Refurbishment	Place	0	0	0	0	50,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	50,000

		Spend / Forecast Spend							Funding				
Project	Service Directorate	2022/23 Funding £	2023/24 Funding £	2024/25 Funding £	2025/26 Funding £	2026/27 Funding £	2027/28 Funding £	2028/29 - 2032/33 Funding £	Funded from Other Grants	Funded from Government Grant	Funded from s106 contributions	Funded from Revenue / IT Reserve	Balance funded from Capital Receipts/ Set-aside receipts/ Borrowing
Royston Leisure Centre Members Changing Refurbishment	Place	0	0	150,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	150,000
Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal Installation	Place	2,600	67,400	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	70,000
S106 Projects	Various	235,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	235,000	0	0
Security - Firewalls	Customers	12,900	7,600	16,000	0	18,000	0	18,000	0	0	0	0	72,500
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Community Engagement Schemes	Enterprise	0	0	163,000	0	0	0	0	0	163,000	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces	Enterprise	0	20,000	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	120,000	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Intervention: Local sports facilities, tournaments, teams and leagues	Resources	0	100,000	100,000	0	0	0	0	0	200,000	0	0	0
Shared Prosperity Fund Community and Place Interventions	Resources	0	60,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	60,000	0	0	0
Solar PV installation at Hitchin Swim Centre	Place	0	142,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	142,000
Solar PV installation at North Herts Leisure Centre	Place	0	338,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	338,000
Solar PV installation at Royston Leisure Centre	Place	0	241,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	241,000
St John's Cemetery Footpath	Place	0	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Swinburne Recration Ground Hitchin	Place	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	30,000
Tablets - Android Devices	Customers	0	26,700	10,000	10,000	10,000	4,000	16,000	0	0	0	0	76,700
Telephony system	Customers	0	3,200	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,200
Thomas Bellamy House, Hitchin	Enterprise	700	64,300	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65,000
Transport Plans implementation (GAF)	Regulatory	0	250,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	250,000	0	0	0
Walsworth Common Pavilion - contribution to scheme	Place	0	300,000	0	0	0	0	0	250,000	0	37,000	0	13,000
Waste and Street Cleansing Vehicles	Place	0	0	0	4,000,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,200,000	800,000
Weston Hills Baldock	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
Weston Hills LNR Footpath Renovation	Place	0	20,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20,000
WiFi Upgrade	Customers	0	0	0	40,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40,000
Wilbury Hills Cemetery Footpaths	Place	8,300	15,300	10,000	0	30,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	63,600
		6,922,900	**11,291,000**	**7,427,000**	**9,784,000**	**1,311,000**	**622,000**	**3,907,000**	**328,300**	**2,171,900**	**891,500**	**3,201,400**	**34,671,800**

Annual Treasury Management Review 2022/23

North Herts Council
April 2023

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Annual Treasury Management Review 2022/23

Purpose

This Council is required by regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003 to produce an annual treasury management review of activities and the actual prudential and treasury indicators for 2022/23. This report meets the requirements of both the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management, (the Code), and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities, (the Prudential Code).

During 2022/23 the minimum reporting requirements were that the full Council should receive the following reports:

- an annual treasury strategy in advance of the year (Council 11/02/2022)
- a mid-year, (minimum), treasury update report (Council 13/12/2022)
- an annual review following the end of the year describing the activity compared to the strategy, (this report)

In addition, Cabinet and the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee have received quarterly treasury management update reports.

The regulatory environment places responsibility on members for the review and scrutiny of treasury management policy and activities. This report is, therefore, important in that respect, as it provides details of the outturn position for treasury activities and highlights compliance with the Council's policies previously approved by members.

This Council confirms that it has complied with the requirement under the Code to give prior scrutiny to all of the above treasury management reports by the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee before they were reported to Cabinet / Full Council. Members are provided with an annual training session on Local Government finance, which takes place in June each year. All members are invited, with a focus on new members attending. Members of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee are now provided with a short training session before each meeting. The content of these sessions is guided by members needs, and treasury management will be considered as a topic for 2023/24.

Executive Summary

During 2022/23, the Council complied with its legislative and regulatory requirements. The key actual prudential and treasury indicators detailing the impact of capital expenditure activities during the year, with comparators, are as follows:

Prudential and treasury indicators	31.3.22 Actual £000	2022/23 Original Budget £000	31.3.23 Actual £000
Capital expenditure	1.434	7.546	6.923
Capital Financing Requirement:	-4.446	-3.183	-2.719
Gross borrowing	0.387	0.367	0.367
External debt	0.387	0.367	0.367
Investments	57.500	47.280	50.500
Net borrowing	-57.133	-46.913	-50.133

Other prudential and treasury indicators are to be found in the main body of this report. The Chief Finance Officer also confirms that borrowing was only undertaken for a capital purpose and the statutory borrowing limit, (the authorised limit), was not breached.

Introduction and Background

This report summarises the following:-

- Capital activity during the year;
- Impact of this activity on the Council's underlying indebtedness, (the Capital Financing Requirement);
- The actual prudential and treasury indicators;
- Overall treasury position identifying how the Council has borrowed in relation to this indebtedness, and the impact on investment balances;
- Summary of interest rate movements in the year;
- Detailed debt activity; and
- Detailed investment activity.

1. The Council's Capital Expenditure and Financing

The Council undertakes capital expenditure on long-term assets. These activities may either be:

- Financed immediately through the application of capital or revenue resources (capital receipts, capital grants, revenue contributions etc.), which has no resultant impact on the Council's borrowing need; or
- If insufficient financing is available, or a decision is taken not to apply resources, the capital expenditure will give rise to a borrowing need.

The actual capital expenditure forms one of the required prudential indicators. The table below shows the actual capital expenditure and how this was financed.

£m General Fund	31.3.22 Actual	2022/23 Working Budget	31.3.23 Actual
Capital expenditure	**1.434**	**8.370**	**6.923**
Financed in year	0.787	6.570	5.192
Unfinanced capital expenditure	**0.647**	**1.800**	**1.731**

2. The Council's Overall Borrowing Need

The Council's underlying need to borrow for capital expenditure is termed the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). This figure is a gauge of the Council's indebtedness. The CFR results from the capital activity of the Council and resources used to pay for the capital spend. It represents the 2022/23 unfinanced capital expenditure (see above table), and prior years' net or unfinanced capital expenditure which has not yet been paid for by revenue or other resources.

Part of the Council's treasury activities is to address the funding requirements for this borrowing need. Depending on the capital expenditure programme, the treasury service organises the Council's cash position to ensure that sufficient cash is available to meet the capital plans and cash flow requirements. This may be sourced through borrowing from external bodies, (such as the Government, through the Public Works Loan Board [PWLB], or the money markets), or utilising temporary cash resources within the Council.

The Council's 2022/23 MRP Policy, (as required by DLUHC Guidance), was approved as part of the Treasury Management Strategy Report for 2022/23 on 11/02/2022.

The Council's CFR for the year is shown below, and represents a key prudential indicator.

CFR (£m): General Fund	31.3.22 Actual £m	2022/23 Working Budget £m	31.3.23 Actual £m
Opening balance	-5.089	-4.446	-4.446
Add unfinanced capital expenditure (as above)	0.647	1.800	1.731
Less Finance Lease Repayments	0.004	0.004	0.004
Closing balance	-4.446	-2.650	-2.719

The negative closing balances mean that the Council does not have a need to borrow.

Borrowing activity is constrained by prudential indicators for gross borrowing and the CFR, and by the authorised limit.

Gross borrowing and the CFR - in order to ensure that borrowing levels are prudent over the medium term and only for a capital purpose, the Council should ensure that its gross external borrowing does not, except in the short term, exceed the total of the capital financing requirement in the preceding year (2022/23) plus the estimates of any additional capital financing requirement for the current (2023/24) and next two financial years. This essentially means that the Council is not borrowing to support revenue expenditure. This indicator allows the Council some flexibility to borrow in advance of its immediate capital needs. The table below highlights the Council's gross borrowing position against the CFR. The Council has complied with this prudential indicator as all borrowing is historic and it is not economical to repay it.

	31.3.22 Actual £m	2022/23 Working Budget £m	31.3.23 Actual £m
Gross borrowing position	0.387	0.367	0.367
CFR	-4.446	-2.650	-2.719

The authorised limit - the authorised limit is the "affordable borrowing limit" required by s3 of the Local Government Act 2003. Once this has been set, the Council does not have the power to borrow above this level. The table below demonstrates that during 2022/23 the Council has maintained gross borrowing within its authorised limit.

The operational boundary – the operational boundary is the expected borrowing position of the Council during the year. Periods where the actual position is either below or over the boundary are acceptable subject to the authorised limit not being breached.

Actual financing costs as a proportion of net revenue stream - this indicator identifies the trend in the cost of capital, (borrowing and other long term obligation costs net of investment income), against the net revenue stream.

	2022/23 £m
Authorised limit	7.1
Maximum gross borrowing position during the year	0.387
Operational boundary	2.1
Average gross borrowing position	0.378
Financing costs as a proportion of net revenue stream	2.51%

3. Treasury Position as at 31st March 2023

The Council's treasury management debt and investment position is organised by the treasury management service in order to ensure adequate liquidity for revenue and capital activities, security for investments and to manage risks within all treasury management activities. Procedures and controls to achieve these objectives are well established both through member reporting detailed in the summary, and through officer activity detailed in the Council's Treasury Management Practices. At the end of 2022/23 the Council's treasury position was as follows:

DEBT PORTFOLIO	31.3.22 Principal £m	Rate/ Return	31.3.23 Principal	Rate/ Return
Fixed rate funding:				
-PWLB	0.387	10.11%	0.367	10.28%
-Market	0		0	
Variable rate funding:				
-PWLB	0		0	
-Market	0		0	
Total debt	**0.387**	**10.11%**	**0.367**	**10.28%**
CFR	**-4.446**		**-2.719**	
Over / (under) borrowing	**4.833**		**3.086**	
Total investments	**57.5**	**0.33%**	**50.5**	**4.19%**
Net debt	**57.113**		**50.133**	

The maturity structure of the debt portfolio was as follows:

	31.3.22 Actual £'000	31.3.23 Actual £'000
Under 12 months	19	21
12 months and within 24 months	21	21
24 months and within 5 years	57	50
5 years and within 10 years	40	25
10 years and above	250	250

INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO	31.3.22 Actual £m	31.3.22 Actual %	31.3.23 Actual £m	31.3.23 Actual %
Treasury investments				
Banks	6.0	10	11.0	22
Building Societies - rated	4.0	7	8.0	16
Building Societies – unrated	1.5	3	0.0	0
Local authorities	25.0	43	29.0	57
DMADF (H M Treasury)	21.0	37	2.5	5
TOTAL TREASURY INVESTMENTS	57.5	100%	50.5	100%

The maturity structure of the investment portfolio was as follows:

	31.3.22 Actual £m	31.3.23 Actual £m
Investments Longer than 1 Year	0	2.0
Investments Up to1 Year	57.5	48.5

The decrease in cash balances as at the end of 2022/23 (compared with 2021/22) is partly due to the balances that the Council was holding at 31/03/22 in relation to the Council Tax Rebate Grant that was repaid in 22/23.

4. The Strategy for 2022/23

The strategy in 2022/23 was to continue lending to UK banks, building societies, money market funds and Local Authorities and allow investments with non-UK banks with a credit rating greater than AA- with a AAA Country rating. Only UK banks that met credit rating criteria ("BBB" or above for longer term deals, and F3 or above for short term deals) were on the Council's lending list. (These are Fitch definitions of ratings). Not all building societies are credit rated but this did not preclude them from the lending list as lending to a building society was dependant on their asset size. Where a society did have a rating, this was considered at the time of the deal taking into account the amount of investment and the length of the deal.

4.1 Investment strategy and control of interest rate risk

Investment returns picked up throughout the course of 2022/23 as central banks, including the Bank of England, realised that inflationary pressures were not transitory, and that tighter monetary policy was called for.

Starting April at 0.75%, Bank Rate moved up in stepped increases of either 0.25% or 0.5%, reaching 4.25% by the end of the financial year, with the potential for a further one or two increases in 2023/24.

The sea-change in investment rates meant local authorities were faced with the challenge of pro-active investment of surplus cash for the first time in over a decade, and this emphasised the need for a detailed working knowledge of cashflow projections so that the appropriate balance between maintaining cash for liquidity purposes, and "laddering" deposits on a rolling basis to lock in the increase in investment rates as duration was extended, became an on-going feature of the investment landscape.

With bond markets selling off, equity valuations struggling to make progress and, latterly, property funds enduring a wretched Q4 2022, the more traditional investment options, such as specified investments (simple to understand, and less than a year in duration) became more actively used.

Meantime, through the autumn, and then in March 2023, the Bank of England maintained various monetary policy easing measures as required to ensure specific markets, the banking system and the economy had appropriate levels of liquidity at times of stress.

Nonetheless, while the Council has taken a cautious approach to investing, it is also fully appreciative of changes to regulatory requirements for financial institutions in terms of additional capital and liquidity that came about in the aftermath of the Great Financial Crisis of 2008/9. These requirements have provided a far stronger basis for financial institutions, with annual stress tests by regulators evidencing how institutions are now far more able to cope with extreme stressed market and economic conditions.

4.2 Borrowing strategy and control of interest rate risk

The policy of avoiding new borrowing by running down spare cash balances which has served well over the last few years continued during 22/23.

5. Borrowing Outturn

Borrowing
No new borrowing was undertaken during the year

Borrowing in advance of need
The Council has not borrowed more than, or in advance of its needs, purely in order to profit from the investment of the extra sums borrowed.

Rescheduling

No rescheduling was done during the year as the average 1% differential between PWLB new borrowing rates and premature repayment rates made rescheduling unviable.

Repayments

£20K of PWLB loans were repaid during the year, as they became due.

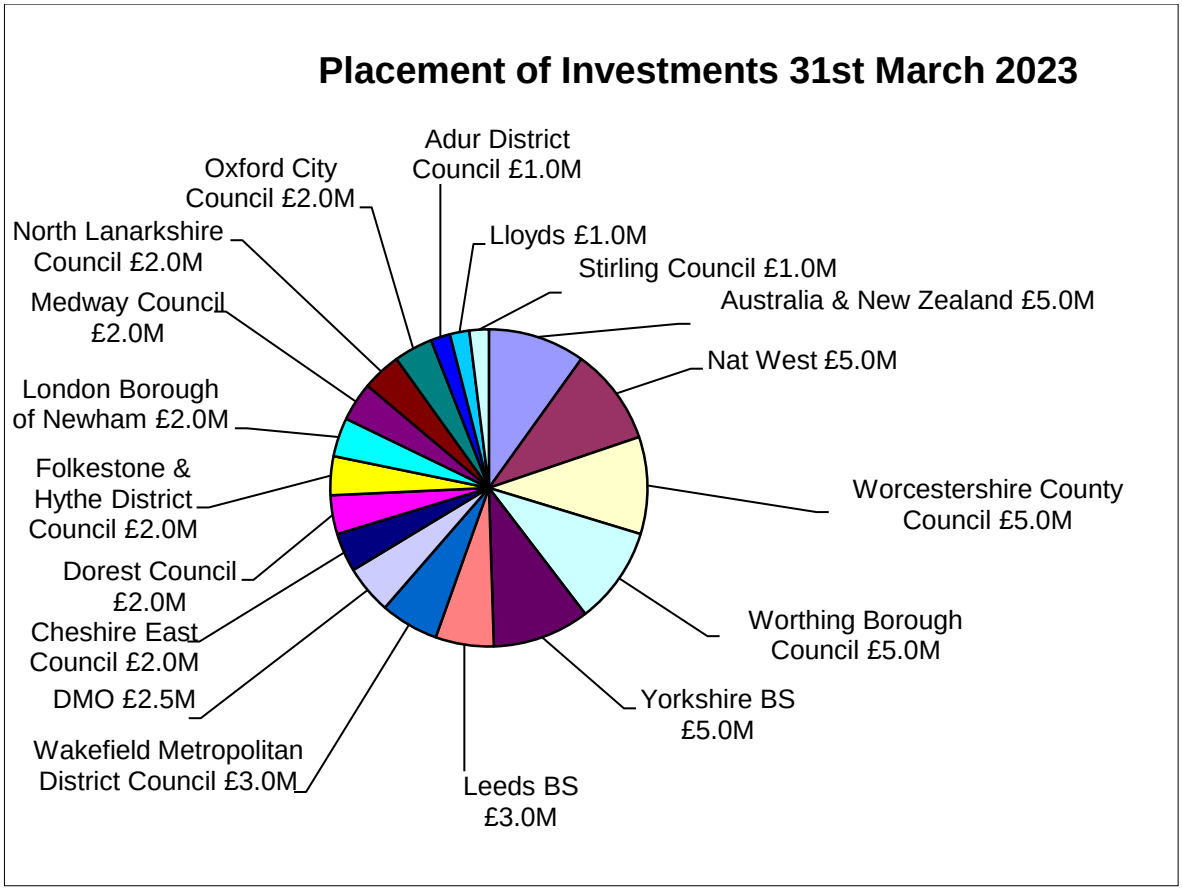
6. Investment Outturn

Investment Policy – the Council's investment policy is governed by DLUHC investment guidance, which has been implemented in the annual investment strategy approved by the Council on 11/02/22. This policy sets out the approach for choosing investment counterparties and is based on credit ratings provided by the Fitch credit rating agency for banks and asset size for building societies.

The investment activity during the year conformed to the approved strategy, and the Council had no liquidity difficulties.

Investments placed by Cash Managers – the Council used an external cash manager to invest some of its longer term cash balances, where the rate achieved (after fees) was better than could be obtained by the Council directly. At the start of the year, Tradition had £3.5m of outstanding investments. This arrangement came to an end during the year when the final two investments matured. These investments generated £9.0K of interest.

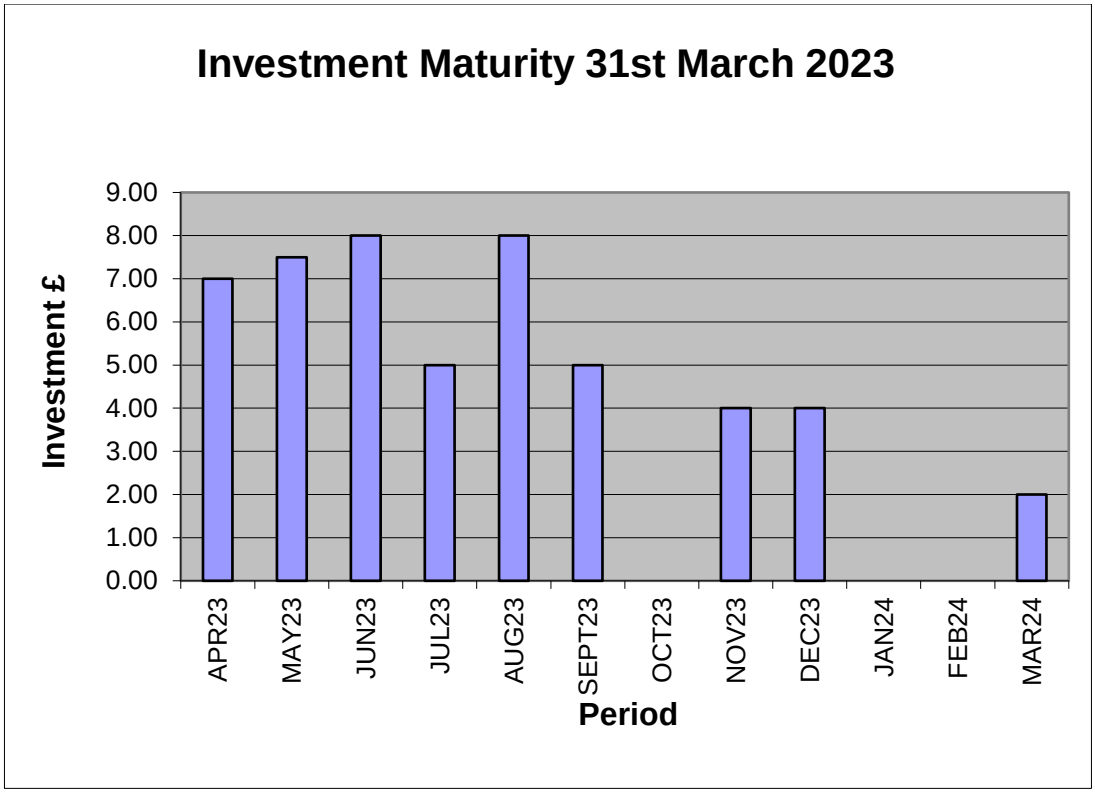
The pie chart below shows the spread of investment balances as at 31 March 2022. This is a snapshot in time that demonstrates the diversification of investments.



The average daily balance of investments was £60.0m with balances varying between £48.5m and £71.0m.

£1.31m of interest was generated from investments during the year. This is more than the estimated interest of £1.277m (as per Quarter 3 forecast).

The graph below shows the maturity profile of investments at 31st March 2023.



The level of risk of any investment will be affected by the riskiness of the institution where it is invested and the period that it is invested for. Where an institution has a credit rating this can be used to measure its riskiness. This can be combined with the period remaining on the investment to give a historic risk of default percentage measure. The table below shows the Historic Risk of Default for outstanding investments at 31 March. The most risky investment still has a risk of default of only around 0.044%. It should also be noted that in general the interest rate received is correlated to the risk, so the interest income received would be less if it took on less risk. All investments have been made in accordance with the Investment Strategy. The risk of default is also affected by the length of the investment.

Borrower	Interest Rate %	Principal	Days to Maturity from 31/03/22	Risk of Default %	Expected Credit Loss £
Yorkshire Building Society	3.88	2,000,000	3	0.000	7
Medway Council	3.9	2,000,000	3	0.000	0
Yorkshire Building Society	3.6	3,000,000	17	0.002	63
Wakefield Council	4.8	3,000,000	42	0.003	0
Australia and New Zealand Bank	4.14	2,000,000	45	0.006	111
DMO	3.975	2,500,000	48	0.003	0
Adur District Council	4.25	1,000,000	81	0.005	0
Worcestershire County Council	3.85	5,000,000	83	0.005	0
Cheshire East Council	4.55	2,000,000	88	0.005	0
Nat West	4.15	2,000,000	111	0.014	275

Stirling Council	3.95	1,000,000	122	0.008	0
North Lanarkshire Council	3.99	2,000,000	122	0.008	0
Leeds Building Society	4.00	3,000,000	129	0.016	479
Worthing Borough Council	3.9	5,000,000	139	0.009	0
Dorset Council	4.5	2,000,000	159	0.010	0
London Borough of Newham	4.4	2,000,000	168	0.010	0
Lloyds Bank	4.28	1,000,000	168	0.021	208
Nat West	4.4	2,000,000	234	0.029	579
Folkestone & Hythe District Council	4.4	2,000,000	244	0.015	0
Nat West	4.2	1,000,000	259	0.032	320
Australia and New Zealand Bank	4.58	1000,000	262	0.032	324
Oxford City Council	4.65	2,000,000	262	0.016	0
Australia and New Zealand Bank	4.4	2,000,000	355	0.044	878

Under IFRS 9, the Code does not recognise a loss allowance where the counterparty is central government or a local authority since relevant statutory provisions prevent default.

FINANCE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE
21 June 2023

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: ANNUAL REPORT ON RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - RESOURCES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: FINANCE AND IT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ALL

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide the Committee with an update on the effectiveness of the Risk Management Governance arrangements at North Herts Council

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee note and provide comments to Cabinet on the Annual Risk Management update, for referral on to Full Council.

2.2. That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee provide comments to Cabinet on the review of the Risk Management Framework.

2.3. That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee comment on the type of Risk Management Training they would like to see going forward.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The responsibility for ensuring the management of risks is that of Cabinet.

3.2. This Committee has responsibility to monitor the effective development and operation of Risk Management.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. There are no alternative options that are applicable.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation has been undertaken with Leadership Team and the Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG). The Executive Member for Finance and IT (as Risk Management Member Champion), the Chair of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and

the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny are all invited to RPMG, as well as key Officers.. Lead Officers discuss risks with the relevant Executive Member.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision first notified on the Forward Plan on the 21 April 2023.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1 In March 2022, Cabinet agreed that risks impacting on the delivery of the Council Plan and linked projects would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee, along with details of projects and associated performance indicators. This forms part of the new Council Delivery Plan along with performance monitoring arrangements. This Committee will focus on its role (as set out in the Constitution) of "monitor[ing] the effective development and operation of risk management". To achieve this, the Committee now receives a mid-year (in December) and end of year (in June) report. The June report will focus on the Annual Report of Risk Management, which will also go to Full Council.

7.2 The Executive Member for Finance and IT in their role as the Member Risk Management Champion was a regular attendee at the quarterly RPMG meetings. The items discussed at these meetings informed the content of the committee reports.

7.3 The RPMG is chaired by the Service Director – Resources, the Officer Champion for Risk Management, who is responsible for the risk management function at a strategic and operational level. This function is delivered by the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager and the Performance and Risk Officer, including the provision of training and support to Officers and Members. The terms of reference for the group were reviewed in November 2022 and are included as Appendix F.

7.4 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) delivers the Council's insurance services and their Risk and Insurance Manager attends RPMG meetings. This enables the Council to obtain an insight into emerging risks and issues at both HCC and other Hertfordshire local authorities. The SIAS Client Audit Manager also attends RPMG meetings, helping to inform the group's understanding of wider risk issues.

7.2 The intention is for the six-monthly reports to provide a wider commentary on Risk, the broader risks and mitigations, and to provide assurance that risk governance arrangements are working, and that effective risk management processes are in place. Detailed review of specific risks can be requested on an ad hoc basis and provide the opportunity to bring the risk owner's expertise into the room.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE

8.1.1 The Councils Risk Management Framework (RMF) requires us to

- Identify and document key risks in all areas of our business, understand them and seek to proactively manage them.
- Assess each risk, identify existing controls, and further actions required to reduce the risk.
- Have Business Continuity Plans in place for each of our service areas, which identify the key functions, what the risks are and how they can be mitigated to allow them to continue operating.
- Develop capacity and skills in identifying, understanding, and managing the risks facing the Council.
- Regularly review the Risk Management Framework and update it in line with statutory and best practice requirements.

8.2 **Risk Identification and Assessment**

8.2.1 The Corporate Risks are the responsibility of the Leadership Team and Cabinet, with Cabinet ensuring the risks are managed appropriately and proportionately. These key risks were those that cut across the delivery of all services, related to key projects or could significantly affect the delivery of Council objectives. They were likely to require a high level of resources to manage and needed to be monitored at a strategic level.

8.2.2 The reporting of Corporate Risks to Cabinet via the half yearly FAR Committee report and the Quarterly O&S Council Delivery Plan updates, allowed details of the top risks facing the Council and how we were managing them to be approved and monitored accordingly.

8.2.3 A full list of Corporate Risks linked to the Council Delivery Plan 22-23, is provided in Appendix A. 28 new risks were created to form the original Council Delivery Plan, reported to this committee in March 2023, and a further 3 risks have been added since that date, namely Churchgate, Resourcing and Shared Prosperity Fund. Reporting on the Council Delivery Plan, has allowed us to streamline the risk records, highlighting the actions the Council needs to take to manage the risk. Each risk has been assessed on Pentana, and shows an initial risk score, current risk score and a target risk score. The controls and mitigating actions column, sets out how officers are proposing to either reach the target risk score, or maintain the existing risk score, if it has been decided the risk cannot be managed any lower. It should therefore be noted that some risks have been managed as low as possible and the residual risk must therefore be accepted.

8.2.4 The following diagram highlights the definitions of likelihood and impact used in the Risk Management Framework.

4 Likelihood High (3) **Impact Low (1)** **Chance of it happening - More than 60%** **Consequences - Minor**	**7 Likelihood High (3)** **Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening - More than 60%** **Consequences - Noticeable effect on the Council**	**9 Likelihood High (3)** **Impact High (3)** **Chance of it happening - More than 60%** **Consequences - Significant impact on the Council**
2 Likelihood Medium (2) **Impact Low (1)** **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences - Minor**	**5 Likelihood Medium (2)** **Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences – Noticeable effect on the Council**	**8 Likelihood Medium (2)** **Impact High (3)** **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences – Significant impact on the Council**
1 Likelihood Low (1) **Impact Low (1)** **Chance of it happening – less than 20%** **Consequences - Minor**	**3 Likelihood Low (1)** **Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening – less than 20%** **Consequences – Noticeable effect on the Council**	**6 Likelihood Low (1)** **Impact High (3)** **Chance of it happening – less than 20%** **Consequences – Significant impact on the Council**

8.2.5 The year-end Council Delivery Plan monitoring report contained the following risks, which have been plotted on the Corporate Risk Matrix to show a visual risk profile of the Plan:

Likelihood	Impact: 1 Low	Impact: 2 Medium	Impact: 3 High
3 High	**4**	**7**	**9** - Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget - Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy - Churchgate
2 Medium	**2** - Town Centre Recovery - Cycling Network - Customer Portal - Empty Homes Strategy - Economic Development Strategy	**5** - Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks - Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal - Town Centre Strategies - Pursue commercial leasing opportunity for Royston Town Hall Annexe - New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land - Master Planning - Charnwood House - Museum Storage - Shared Prosperity Fund	**8** - Increased Homelessness - Resourcing
1 Low	**1** - Tourism Strategy - Business Recovery: Grants - EV Charging for Council Vehicles - Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review - Help Residents Make Payments at Convenient Locations - Supplier Self-Service - Green Space Management Strategy	**3** - Museum/HTH Recovery - Health Inequalities - Full Review of Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Local Government Boundary Review	**6** - Local Plan Implementation

The analysis of Risk data and changes to Risk Scores between 1 April 2022 and production of the year-end monitoring report, is shown in Table 1

Table 1	**Council Delivery Plan Risks**	**Service Risks**
Green Risks (1-3)	16	11
Amber Risks (4-6)	10	20
Red Risks (7-9)	5	8
TOTAL (at end of period)	**31**	**39**
Risks with reduced risk scores	12	5
Risks with increased risk scores	0	2
Risks with unchanged risk scores	19	32
TOTAL (at end of period)	**31**	**39**
New Risks	31	3
Retained throughout year	0	53
Less: Archived Risks	0	17
TOTAL (at end of period)	**31**	**39**

8.3 **Emerging Risks**

8.3.1 **Resourcing**

Reporting on progress against the Council Delivery Plan to Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet has allowed us to monitor the Corporate Risks linked to Projects on a regular basis. As each project now has a linked risk, it has become clear that a recurring theme is resourcing, which shows as an ever- present risk. A new Corporate Risk for Resourcing with a risk score of 8 has been introduced. (Appendix B) Vital additional actions, which this year have included supporting businesses by paying the Government Support Grants, and support for the Homes for Ukraine scheme, require resources, both staff and financial, to be redirected. This affects the delivery of other projects within the Council Delivery Plan, resulting in project timelines becoming difficult to achieve.

In order to mitigate the risk, consideration is given to getting in new staff resource, particularly where New Burdens Funding is available, as well as looking at process automation and signposting to external resources and support. Projects will be prioritised and lower priority projects will be dropped where necessary. The target risk score has been set as 2.

In addition, HR are improving how we recruit and retain staff. This includes a review of recruitment processes, updating and improving the recruitment webpages and increased and improved use of social media for recruitment advertising. The employee benefits offering has been reviewed and extended following an employee survey. Our apprentice scheme continues to provide opportunities to grow our own and trainee roles have been introduced in addition to the Council apprentice scheme to support hard to fill areas.

8.3.2 **Shared Prosperity Fund**

On the same theme as the Resourcing risk, is the new Corporate Risk relating to the Shared Prosperity Fund (Appendix B) This new risk has been set up with a risk score of 5. There is a risk that a lack of general resources to deliver these projects will mean we are not able to fully take advantage of the funding available. We may fail to spend the money in the correct year, especially if there are delays in Government approval. Officers are required to provide returns to Government on the use of the Grant and these must be completed accurately. There can also be long lead in times for capital elements which means that items are unavailable until beyond the end of the funding period.

As with the general "Resourcing" risk, there is a need to prioritise and drop the delivery of lower priority projects. Officers are undertaking preparation work where there is a low -cost impact and we must ensure that we respond promptly to requests from Government in order to get plans approved as soon as possible.
It is also intended to look at using the admin element of grants to buy in support for monitoring and submitting returns where possible and investigating the availability of required kit/materials in order to source them at the earliest opportunity. It is hoped that these actions will allow us to achieve the target risk score of 3.

8.3.2 **Churchgate**

The purchase of Churchgate has created an opportunity for the Council for the regeneration of the Centre and the surrounding area, which has been long awaited. However, it also brings the risk that the regeneration of the area will not meet the expectations of stakeholders. In addition, high inflation and the potential for a recession will have an impact on the affordability of the project and what we are able to achieve. A Corporate Risk with a risk score of 9 has been set up.(Appendix B)

In order to mitigate the risks, Officers have a Communications and Consultation plan in place which will be regularly updated. All key decisions will be explained, and it will be made clear that compromises may have to be made on the project. Financial and Consultancy support will be sought as needed and cost effectiveness and value for money will play a key part when developing the options for the site. It is hoped that implementing these actions will allow us to reduce the risk score to the target score of 6.

8.3.3 **Re Procurement of the Shared Waste Contract**

Waste management and recycling is the highest profile service that affects every resident of the district. We are the lead authority for the joint waste contract with East Herts Council. The procurement is now underway to secure the next contract. Procurement and implementation of key contracts are risk areas for the Council and it is essential that a seamless transition is managed if there is a change in contractor. A new Corporate Risk will be included on the 2023-24 Council Delivery Plan with a risk score of 9.

8.3.4 **Cyber Risks**

Prolonged disruption to/failure of IT infrastructure/systems remains a high-risk area for the Council to manage. In line with all other local authorities, and businesses in general, this is likely to remain the case over the long-term, due to the constantly

evolving threats to our cyber security and the high impact on service/project delivery of risks materialising. The risk level will also be influenced by any change of risk appetite relating to the provision of individual systems i.e., moving to more cloud hosted options. Broadly speaking, the main threats can be summarised into three categories - deliberate and unauthorised breaches of security (e.g., a cyber-attack), unintentional breaches of security (e.g., accidental action by staff) and weakness/failure of essential IT infrastructure (e.g., loss of internet access). The IT service constantly manage and adapt to these risks on a day-to-day basis, with certain officers within the team having specific cyber security responsibilities.

8.4 **Review of Risks**

8.4.1 Risk reviews are scheduled within Pentana Risk, (our performance and risk software) and automated reminders are sent to service areas when risks are due to be reviewed, in line with the RMF requirements. Red Risks are reviewed most regularly – every 3 months, with Amber risks every 6 months and Green risks being reviewed at least once a year. Service areas are assisted by the Performance and Risk Officer to ensure that information is captured in line with the RMF.

For the period from April 22 to date, all Corporate risk reviews were carried out in line with the RMF requirements. For service risks, 69% of Red risks, 93% of Amber risks and 100% of Green Risks were reviewed.

8.4.2 A report on progress made against the Council Delivery Plan was taken to Overview and Scrutiny on 6 September 2022. Members commented on the report content and requested that project milestones be included in subsequent reports and this request has been actioned. The report was subsequently taken to Cabinet. As per the new Performance Management Framework, this ensures that Cabinet have oversight of both risk and performance.

8.5 **Archived Risks**

Archived risks for the full year are included as Appendices C. Archived risks are risks which have been managed down to business as usual, as per the RMF, or have been replaced by more relevant risks.

All risks can be viewed on Pentana, the Council's Risk and Performance software. Guest login details and guidance on navigating the system can be found on the intranet at the link below.

Pentana Risk | Intranet (north-herts.gov.uk)

8.6 **Review of the Risk Management Framework**

8.6.1 At the RPMG meeting in November, the group reviewed the proposed changes to the Risk Management Framework, included as Appendix D. This was a light touch update with relatively minor changes, such as changes to names and reporting lines, which have also been reflected in the updated terms of reference for Risk and Performance

Management Group. The Risk Management Strategy provides tools to keep the Risk descriptions succinct, rather than setting out a mandated approach. Even if target risk scores are reached, if the risk is still assessed to be at an unacceptable level, further mitigating actions should be considered.

8.7 **Risk Awareness and Appetite**

8.7.1 The Council is committed to the proactive identification and management of key external and internal risks that may affect the delivery of objectives. This allows us to be risk aware, understanding that risks may increase as services evolve and more commercial opportunities are developed and undertaken.

8.7.2 The Council's risk appetite is its willingness to accept risks to realise opportunities and achieve objectives. We must take risks and 'be brave' to evolve and to continue to deliver services effectively, deciding what risks we want to take and what ones we want to avoid, whilst acknowledging that we cannot or should not avoid all risks. The Risk Management Framework recognises that risks accompany all new objectives and opportunities, and it provides guidance on managing them appropriately.

8.7.3 At the May meeting of the RPMG a discussion was undertaken on the wider risks which may have an impact on the Council. This included the continuing war in Ukraine, and the China-Taiwan conflict, all of which could lead to supply chain failure / issues, and computer chip shortages. Inflation also continues to be a concern, and is reflected in the new Churchgate Risk entry. Discussion took place on whether inflation should be a standalone Risk entry, however as the Council has a relatively small Capital Programme, with only a low number of large projects, this may not be needed, as it can be captured at project level.
It was agreed that it would be beneficial to review the links between Business Continuity Plans and the Risk Register to ensure that all relevant risks were reflected in both, although this is not a priority. It has also been decided that the Council's Senior Manager Group should undertake a review of emerging risks.

8.7.4 The Council will have a range of different appetites for different risks depending on the circumstances and these will vary over time. The Risk Management Framework specifies that we will actively manage and monitor risks scoring 4 or higher on the risk matrix. This includes monitoring the completion of risk management activities and assessing their effectiveness.

8.7.5 Discussions on risk appetite have taken place, particularly among the Officer Leadership Team and the Officer/Cabinet Leadership Team. This has determined that we will assess our risk appetite on a project-by-project basis. This allows the benefits of a project to be balanced against both the resources and risks involved.

8.7.6 As reported in the Council Delivery Plan year-end monitoring report, 15 Corporate Risks had a score of 4 or above:

- Churchgate (9)
- Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget (9)

- Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy (9)
- Increased Homelessness (8)
- Resourcing (8)
- Local Plan Implementation (6)
- Charnwood House (5)
- Master Planning (5)
- Museum Storage (5)
- New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land (5)
- Pursue commercial leasing opportunity for Royston Town Hall Annexe (5)
- Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks (5)
- Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal (5)
- Shared Prosperity Fund (5)
- Town Centre Strategies (5)

8.7.7 The FAR Committee has a role in monitoring how effectively the Council delivers against its strategic approach to risk appetite.

9 Insurance Review

9.1 Hertfordshire County Council continued to handle the Council's insurance arrangements under a shared service arrangement. Due to the contract for the Property, Motor, Personal Accident and Crime insurance ending on 31 March 2023, a tender exercise was carried out using the YPO insurance framework. This resulted in new insurers from 1 April 2023 for these policies apart from Crime insurance, which was retained by Zurich Municipal.

9.2 The Council transfers some financial risks to its insurers. Public liability insurance provides the Council with insurance cover for claims made by the public for personal injury and/or property damage. These types of claim are subject to a £10,000 excess that is charged to the responsible service area. Areas that have been subject to a claim are identified and wherever possible, action is taken to prevent future damage to property or personal injury.

9.3 As at 31 March 2023, only two insurance claims were received from the public relating to the policy year 2022/23. Although claims are made, these are not always successful for the claimant, as payments of compensation are made only when there is a proven legal liability.

9.4 The Municipal Mutual Insurance (MMI) Scheme of Arrangement was triggered in 2013 and the Council now pays 25% of any new claims dating back to the period that MMI was the Council's insurer (1974 to 1993). The Council's Financial Risks make provision for any new claims and any further levy demands relating to the period that MMI were the Council's insurers. As at 31 March 2023, there are no outstanding claims with MMI.

10 Business Continuity

10.1 Business Continuity Planning (BCP) continues to be a key focus for the Council. In 2022/23, work included the development of the Operation London Bridge Business

Continuity Plan (events following the death of Queen Elizabeth II), completion of the 2022 Business Impact Analysis (BIA) process, development of a revised Operational Service Continuity Plan template for critical services and commencement of the review of all Resilience Plans.

10.2 A SIAS audit was carried out in late 2022 covering the BCP process and IT Disaster Recovery. The final report provided limited overall assurance and made one high priority (Limited evidence of IT disaster recovery procedures and outdated policies) and two medium priority (Incomplete BIA process/forms and BCP training) recommendations. All finalised audit reports are sent to members of FAR.

10.3 During 2023/24, we will complete the review of all Resilience Plans taking into account learning from recent exercises, incidents and responses, and the SIAS audit report findings. The review will include the development of procedures for key business interruption risks e.g., national power outage, loss of IT and adverse weather. Service Continuity Plans will be completed for critical services, and we will carry out the 2023 BIA process in the autumn. Following completion of the plans, the BCP training schedule will recommence, including training for staff, and a series of exercises to test the new arrangements e.g., tabletop and discussion-based exercises to test corporate arrangements, and service level exercises.

10.4 During 2022, we carried out a full BIA review, with all services returning an initial 'BIA 1 form' describing service functions, impacts of service interruption and dependencies. This informed a list of the Council's critical functions that must be prioritised in the event of a major internal business disruption, which was agreed by Leadership Team. An additional 'BIA 2' form was completed for all identified critical functions. Operational Service Continuity Plans will be completed for services with critical functions, and these will be updated annually. Leadership Team monitor critical service functions, with Service Directors responsible for lower-level risks in their areas. The current list (in effect up to September 2023) includes 17 services with critical functions.

10.5 The Council has a statutory responsibility under the Civil Contingencies Act to maintain business continuity plans. Our comprehensive structure consists of a number of plans including the main Resilience Plan that provides direction on the Council's corporate response to an emergency/major business disruption and plans at a corporate cross-Council level and operational level. On completion of the review of Resilience Plans, a revised plan structure will be produced.

10.6 The Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum takes a lead role in BCP, and the Resilience Team participate in related group meetings. Council officers have good relationships with local organisations and contractors and work closely with neighbouring authorities on topics such as cybercrime, reception centres, managing equipment, and mutual aid.

10.7 The Business Continuity Awareness Week (BCAW) in May 2022 had the theme 'Building Resilience in the Hybrid World' and was promoted to staff and the public. The 2023 BCAW campaign will be held in May 2023 with the theme 'Embracing the challenge of Resilience' and will again be promoted by the Council.

10.8 BCP information is available on the Intranet and the Council's website, along with links to additional advice and guidance from HCC and Government.

11 Health and Safety

11.1 A review of the approach to risk assessment was completed. A new risk assessment template was developed, which is in line with HSE guidance and presented in an easy-to-use format. The H&S risk assessment information document was updated, which includes guidance on completing risk assessments and links to the Grow Zone risk assessment training modules for managers. Both documents are available on the Intranet.

11.2 A review of the Incident Register was also completed, with updated guidance now available on the Intranet. A review of the suitability of the current Incident Register app is still to be undertaken with IT and this will be scheduled in once IT have completed the current V3 laptop rollout

11.3 SIAS conducted a review of lone working procedures and made several recommendations to bring them in line with current legislation. A complete review of the procedures and risk assessment process and template was also undertaken, with relevant previous documentation incorporated into a newly developed H&S Lone Working information document. This provides guidance on the measures to be undertaken and highlights the different types of lone working devices that are available. A new lone working risk assessment template was produced to help managers when considering their department's needs. All documents are available on the Intranet.

11.4 A review of first aid provision at the main District Council Offices was undertaken. This concluded that the number of trained first aiders would not guarantee that cover could be provided across the full working week. Following a successful campaign for more volunteers to take up first aid training, the number of first aiders has now increased. A DCO First Aiders "in/out" noticeboard is now in use to indicate which first aiders are on site at any given time. We are also introducing a new larger fixed first aid station, which will be located in the ground floor kitchen area. This is designed to allow staff immediate access to basic first aid items, with Property Services monitoring and replenishing stock levels. A book will also be available to record any items used. The accident book will also be moved to the same ground floor location, with the online version remaining available on the Intranet. First Aid information posters will also be placed around the building, to offer basic first aid advice.

12 Developing Capacity and Skills

12.1 The Performance and Risk Officer has always worked closely with Officers giving advice and guidance when each risk review is completed, but there is more work to undertake in this area to ensure Officer and Member skills are developed. In 2021 an E-Learning module for Risk Management was set up on Grow Zone for completion by Officers. As at 31/03/2023 107 officers had completed the learning. This e-learning is also available to members and can be accessed via the Growzone at the link below.
RM: Risk Management eLearning (learningpool.com)

The last report taken to FAR in March 2023 requested feedback from members of the group and subsequently Cabinet on the type of training they would like to see going forwards, but no particular requirements have been forthcoming. A SIAS audit on the Risk and Performance Management Function carried out in March 2023 (appendix E) gave reasonable assurance on the risk management function, but contained a number of recommendations which will enable us to strengthen our process. It identified the need for Member training to be developed, as one of the recommendations. This will therefore be one of the key actions to undertake in the 23-24 year. The annual finance training for new members (and existing members are encouraged to attend) has been extended to also cover an introduction to risk. Members of FAR are asked to specify any additional training that they require.

13 Achieving the Key Actions for 2022/23

13.1 Last year's Annual Report detailed the following key actions for 2021/22 to enhance the Risk Management Framework:

Action	Due Date
Undertake the annual review of Risk Management Framework documentation.	31/12/22
Continue to develop the Risk Management toolkit throughout the year.	31/03/23
Refine the new Council Delivery Plan combined performance monitoring arrangements throughout the year.	31/03/23
Undertake Insurance tender.	31/03/23
Completion of Performance Management Framework guidance documents (action will span more than one year, as requirements evolve).	31/03/24

13.2 As detailed in Section 5, a review of Risk Management Framework documentation was undertaken in late 2022 and was reported to Members in December 2022.

13.3 Further targeted promotion of the e-learning module is underway, as not all current Risk Owners and Risk Assignees have completed it (currently a 65% completion rate). In practical terms, the Performance & Risk Officer continues to provide guidance and support to officers undertaking risk reviews.

13.4 Following the continued ad-hoc development of a Risk Management toolkit, in 2023/24, a comprehensive review will be undertaken, and further improvements made. This will form part of a wider project to review all available risk and performance information. Completion of this project aims to implement the medium priority SIAS audit recommendation, prepare for the upcoming move from the current Intranet to Sharepoint, and to ensure that only up to date and relevant guidance is available to

Officers and Members, for example, access to the recently revised Project Risk Log template.

13.5 As detailed in Section 9, an insurance tender exercise was undertaken during 2022/23 and new insurance arrangements commenced from 1 April 2023.

14 Key Actions for 2023/24

14.1 The implementation of the following actions in 2023/24 will ensure the continued development of risk management at the Council:

Action	Due Date
Undertake the annual review of Risk Management Framework documentation.	31/12/23
Update the Risk Management E- Learning Module on Growzone to reflect the updated Strategy	30/09/23
Develop Member Training on Risk and deliver to key members of FARC and O&S	31/12/23
Continue to refine the new Council Delivery Plan combined performance monitoring arrangements throughout the year.	31/03/24

15. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The Committee's Terms of Reference include "to monitor the effective development and operation of risk management and corporate governance, agree actions (where appropriate) and make recommendations to Cabinet" (Constitution 10.1.5 (u)).

16. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, it should be noted that there are issues linked to the Resourcing risk (e.g., Cost of Living and inflation) that will affect the Council's financial situation.

17. RISK IMPLICATIONS

17.1 The Risk and Opportunities Management Strategy requires the Finance Audit and Risk Committee to consider regular reports on the Councils Corporate Risks. Failure to provide the Committee with regular updates would conflict with the agreed Strategy and would mean that this Committee could not provide assurance to Cabinet that the Councils identified Corporate Risks are being managed.

18. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

18.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment,

victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

18.2 Reporting on the management of risk provides a means to monitor whether the Council are meeting the stated outcomes of the district priorities, its targets or delivering accessible and appropriate services to the community to meet different people's needs. The risks of NHDC failing in its Public Sector Equality Duty are recorded on the Risk Register. The Councils risk management approach is holistic, taking account of commercial and physical risks. It should also consider the risk of not delivering a service in an equitable, accessible manner, and especially to its most vulnerable residents, such as those who are homeless.

19. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

19.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report.

20. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

20.1 There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

21. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

21.1 The proposed Resourcing risk highlights the potential impact on staff of taking on new tasks.

22. APPENDICES

22.1. Appendix A –Corporate Risks
Appendix B – New Corporate Risks
Appendix C - Archived Corporate Risks
Appendix D – Risk Management Framework documents
Appendix E – Performance and Risk Management Audit Report
Appendix F – RPMG Terms of Reference

23. CONTACT OFFICERS

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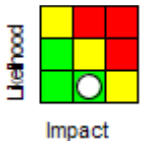
24. BACKGROUND PAPERS

24.1 SIAS Audit report – Business Continuity Planning (Feb 23)

NHC Risk Register

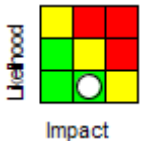
Generated on: 06 April 2023

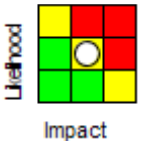
Risk Code	CDP01	Risk Title	Museum/HTH Recovery
Service Area	Enterprise	Risk Owner	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. All related milestones carry the risk of new emerging variants or a worsening Covid picture; separately, the booking of Hitchin Town Hall and income levels may be impacted by the rising cost of living and the reduced levels of disposable income. 2. Lack of interest in the facilities following extended period of closure and restrictions. 3. Inability to generate income as well as hoped and to the levels targeted.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	18-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Increased use of advertising and new website (implemented and ongoing).		

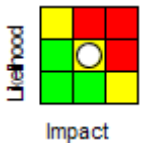
Risk Code	CDP02	Risk Title	Tourism Strategy
Service Area	Enterprise	Risk Owner	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Risk of delay in procuring consultants and subsequent delay to production of strategy.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	18-Nov-2022
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Ensure specification for procurement is sufficiently robust and written in a timely manner (Due date to be confirmed). - Regular meetings to be set up with consultants (Due date to be confirmed).		

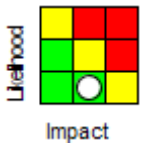
Risk Code	CDP03	Risk Title	Business Recovery: Grants
Service Area	Customers	Risk Owner	Jo Dufficy
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Lack of resources available to deliver grant schemes.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	11-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Utilised additional resources. - Shadowing within the team increased resilience.		
Ongoing Work			

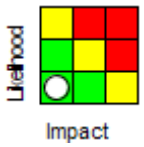
Risk Code	CDP04	Risk Title	Town Centre Recovery
Service Area	Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Resourcing the project – limited budget available. 2. Town Strategy not yet in place.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	25-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Look for external grants (we have been allocated SPF funding and are now developing delivery plans).		

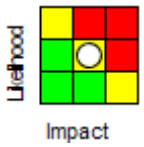
Risk Code	CDP05	Risk Title	Health Inequalities
Service Area	Legal & Community; Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone; Jeanette Thompson
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	People First
Risk Description	1. Inability to achieve funding. 2. Delays in achieving funding affects delivery of outcomes. 3. Terms of any funding affects what can be delivered. 4. Staff shortages/competing priorities limit progress.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	10-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Funding secured and intervention plan approved (Health and Wellbeing).		
Ongoing Work	- Working with partner organisations to deliver the projects.		

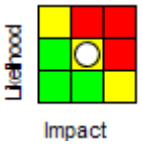
Risk Code	CDP06	Risk Title	Economic Development Strategy
Service Area	Enterprise	Risk Owner	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Uncertainty over focus of the strategy. 2. Determination of level of priority and the funding to be allocated from 2023/24.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	18-Nov-2022
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Develop strategy options and then seek a steer on desired focus. - Secure resource beyond 2022/23 to deliver any strategy.		

Risk Code	CDP07	**Risk Title**	Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks
Service Area	Regulatory	**Risk Owner**	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Not successful in obtaining grant funding. 2. Unable to identify/procure a private sector partner.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	25-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Look at alternative methods of delivery e.g., offer land with no Council involvement (should the initial procurement of a private sector partner prove unsuccessful).		

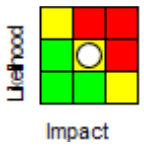
Risk Code	CDP08	Risk Title	Cycling Network
Service Area	Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Resourcing for NHC and HCC. 2. Timing and adoption of LCWIP by HCC Transport Panel/Cabinet. 3. Limits to what can be achieved in this financial year.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	25-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Regular communication and partnership working with HCC (ongoing).		

Risk Code	CDP09	Risk Title	EV Charging for Council Vehicles
Service Area	Resources	Risk Owner	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Lead-in time from supplier could cause delays. 2. Number of options available makes it difficult to determine optimal option. (No longer a risk - option selected and contract awarded.)		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	17-Aug-2022
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Analysed available options from suppliers. - Awarded contract. - Established delivery/installation timeline and installation completed.		
Ongoing Work			

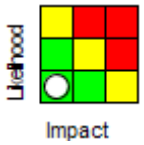
Risk Code	CDP10	**Risk Title**	Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal
Service Area	Place	**Risk Owner**	Sarah Kingsley
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Tender returns over budget. 2. Delays to project plan.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	14-Dec-2022
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Cabinet approved increased capital budget (13 September 2022).		
Ongoing Work	- Working with consultant on the procurement exercise. - Researching and contacting prospective contractors. - Regular project meetings to be held with contractor (ongoing throughout project).		

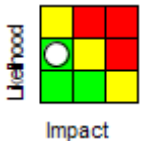
Risk Code	CDP11	Risk Title	Town Centre Strategies
Service Area	Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Lack of available resource to produce and deliver identified strategies.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	25-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Ensure resource is available to deliver strategies (currently still recruiting to a new Project Officer post). - Look for external funding. - Take applications through master planning process.		

Risk Code	CDP12	Risk Title	Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review
Service Area	Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Budget implications of selected scheme.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	25-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	1. Produce detailed business case and go through approval process. 2. Retain/replace existing machines and software.		

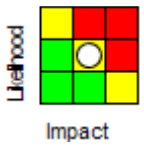
Risk Code	CDP13	**Risk Title**	Replacement of Royston Town Hall Annexe
Service Area	Enterprise	**Risk Owner**	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	People First
Risk Description	1. Cost and time in acquiring rights or addressing restrictions are prohibitive. 2. Planning permission refused or subject to unviable conditions. 3. Desire to retain partial community use impinges on viability. 4. Build cost inflation impinges on viability. 5. Lack of engagement from HCC restricts our ability to acquire access rights.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	12-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Exploring options following unsolicited solid interest in site (ongoing). - As the project progresses, proactive and frequent discussion with key site stakeholders e.g., RTC and Citizens Advice. - Engage reputable local and national agents to garner wide audience for marketing and generate maximum interest, if appropriate. - Frequent communication with Town and NHC Ward Councillors, as appropriate. - Consider adopting modern methods of construction, if feasible. - Continue to pursue engagement with HCC regarding access rights.		

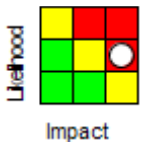
Risk Code	CDP14	Risk Title	Customer Portal
Service Area	Customers	Risk Owner	Jo Dufficy
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	People First
Risk Description	1. Additional modules are not forthcoming.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	10-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Considered links to transformation programme and outcomes of Tquila report.		
Ongoing Work	- Utilise suppliers experience with other Councils (in progress and ongoing). - Discussions with service areas to investigate options. - Progress implementation of Waste into MyAccount (dependent on decisions relating to the new waste contract).		

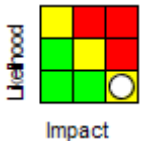
Risk Code	CDP15	**Risk Title**	Help Residents Make Payments at Convenient Locations
Service Area	Resources	**Risk Owner**	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	People First
Risk Description	1. Resourcing issues delay progress. 2. Unexpected costs affect viability of business case. 3. Residents fail to use the service provided.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	13-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Set up regular project meetings to advance project. - Options allowed for phased implementation if costs were an issue. - Communication plan in place.		
Ongoing Work	- Ongoing communication with residents.		

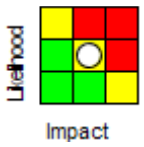
Risk Code	CDP16	Risk Title	Supplier Self-Service
Service Area	Resources	Risk Owner	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	People First
Risk Description	1. Failure to find viable solution. 2. Resource issues delay progress. 3. Suppliers do not submit invoices via the portal, fail to achieve efficiencies. 4. Data security issues.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	18-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Carry out data impact assessment (on hold). - Set up regular project meetings to advance project (on hold). - Communication plan to make suppliers aware of benefits (on hold).		

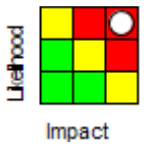
Risk Code	CDP17	**Risk Title**	Empty Homes Strategy
Service Area	Regulatory	**Risk Owner**	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	Sustainability
Risk Description	Development of Strategy Risks: - Staff shortages/competing priorities limit progress with developing Strategy. - Potential political/reputational risk associated with not having an agreed strategic approach in place. - Resource implications/limitations relating to the different options available. Implementation of Adopted Strategy Risks (dependent on the agreed approach): - Securing the resources required to deliver the Strategy and achieve objectives. - Limited number of empty homes that we can actually take forward under the Strategy. - Cost to Council of maintaining empty properties that we acquire. - Political/reputational risk associated with a perceived lack of progress and/or cost/benefit analysis of our approach.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	22-Mar-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	Controls/Mitigations - Draft Strategy produced and considered by Executive Member and Deputy in September 2022. - Staff resource to enable delivery of the final Strategy as part of a new Housing Improvement Officer role approved by Full Council on 23 February 2023.		
Ongoing Work	- Refining draft Strategy, with outcomes and delivery linked directly to the preferred approach and resources available. - Agreeing timeframe for adoption (expected to be either the 27 June or 26 September 2023 Cabinet meetings).		

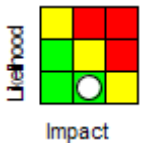
Risk Code	CDP18	**Risk Title**	New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land
Service Area	Enterprise	**Risk Owner**	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Ensuring Contract Procurement Rules are adhered to. 2. Being able to develop a viable project. 3. Housing development subject to planning. 4. Working with the right supplier(s) for the Council. 5. Demand to provide more homes across the District.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	01-Feb-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Undertaking market research exercise with a cross-section of the development market regarding options for joint ventures (consultant's report expected by the end of May 2023). - Work closely with the Finance team and selected supplier to try to develop a viable project; factor in borrowing costs. - Work closely with relevant service areas and selected supplier to ensure the proposed developments are in line with expectations. - Work with the Procurement and Legal team to run a successful tender that will allow us to work with the right supplier. - Align relevant policies and company values when selecting supplier.		

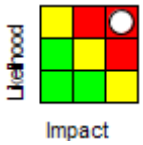
Risk Code	CDP19	**Risk Title**	Increased Homelessness
Service Area	Regulatory	**Risk Owner**	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	People First
Risk Description	1. An excessive demand from the public for housing services. 2. A lack of alternative housing options. 3. An increase in the levels of homelessness. 4. An increased use of hotel accommodation for homeless households. 5. Major difficulties for some members of the public to access the private rented sector. 6. High levels of support are required for some clients/families.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	17-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- On 31 January 2023, Cabinet agreed a package of measures to help prevent/relieve homelessness.		
Ongoing Work	- Increase the provision of specialist supported accommodation for homeless single people. - Pursue opportunities for government grant funding to facilitate new sites and specialist support services. - Review opportunities to increase the number of temporary accommodation units for homeless families.		

Risk Code	CDP20	Risk Title	Local Plan Implementation
Service Area	Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Delay in inspectors report on the new Local Plan, resulting in a longer period without appropriate guidance (risk removed). 2. Increased uncertainty of planning policy base (risk removed). 3. Delay or failure to adoption/implementation of the new Local Plan (risk removed). 4. Legal challenge to Local Plan (minor residual risk remains). 5. Intervention by the Secretary of State i.e., issuing a holding direction (risk removed). 6. 'Hostile' applications in areas not designated within the Local Plan.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	20-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Advice sought from PAS, Counsel and DLUC. - Regular Project Board meetings.		
Ongoing Work			

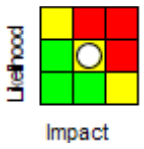
Risk Code	CDP21	Risk Title	Master Planning
Service Area	Regulatory	Risk Owner	Ian Fullstone
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Failure to secure funding to resource the process. 2. Inspector's report modifies master planning policy (risk removed). 3. Non-adoption of the Local Plan (risk removed). 4. Reduction in pre-application income and delay to income from planning applications. 5. Failure to recruit sufficiently experienced officers. 6. Risk of adverse appeal findings on other/non-Local Plan sites if delivery is delayed or stalled.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	20-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Inspector's report recommending modifications. - Adoption of Local Plan by Full Council on 8 November 2022.		
Ongoing Work	- Secure funding for resources through Planning Performance Agreements. - Monthly Project Board meetings to escalate barriers to progress. - Ongoing recruitment to vacant planning positions.		

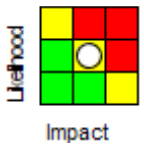
Risk Code	CDP22	**Risk Title**	Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget
Service Area	Resources	**Risk Owner**	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Funding reductions as a result of new funding formula. 2. Loss of sales, fees, and charges income due to continuing impact of COVID-19. 3. Not able to make the required decisions to deliver budget savings required. 4. Increases in costs (reductions in income) when contracts are renewed and as a result of inflationary increases.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	03-Feb-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- On 22 September 2022, Council approved the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-28.		
Ongoing Work	- Revise funding projections as a result of formula changes and insight of future direction. - MTFS sets out a strategy for addressing funding gaps, including how difficult service funding decisions will need to be made. - Regular budget monitoring to highlight any issues, including extent and speed of COVID recovery, and impact of inflation.		

Risk Code	CDP23	**Risk Title**	Full Review of Council Tax Reduction Scheme
Service Area	Customers	**Risk Owner**	Jo Dufficy
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Lack of resources and specific skills to deliver. 2. Impact on the project of consultation outcomes.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	25-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Commissioned consultant to provide expert support to the project on 21 March 2022.		
Ongoing Work			

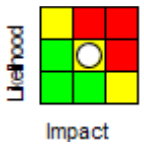
Risk Code	CDP24	**Risk Title**	Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy
Service Area	Place	**Risk Owner**	Sarah Kingsley
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Delays in confirmation of government strategy or legislation. 2. Protracted decision making. 3. Lack of interest from suppliers. 4. Increased cost uncertainty. 5. Reduced income from chargeable services. 6. Protracted contract negotiations. 7. Confusion by residents over new services. 8. Reduction in resident satisfaction due to requirements to recycle more etc. 9. Impact on Council reputation due to difficult service change mobilisation. 10. Failure by Government to honour 'New Burdens' doctrine.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	31-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Appointed consultants in September 2022 to inform best practice, progress service design and support procurement.		
Ongoing Work	- Development of plans and service design based on most likely outcomes, best practice, and financial sustainability. - Regular cross party Member engagement. - Early negotiations with Urbaser and parallel soft market testing.		

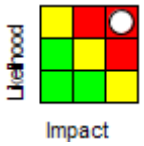
Risk Code	CDP25	Risk Title	Green Space Management Strategy
Service Area	Place	Risk Owner	Sarah Kingsley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	Sustainability
Risk Description	1. Tenders received are not within budget.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	05-Oct-2022
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Plans allowed for phased implementation should costs have become a significant issue. - Regular communication with partner agency/contractors to advance projects. - Regular briefings to Members regarding progress and public communication of projects completing/opening.		
Ongoing Work			

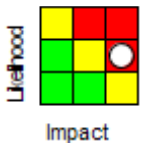
Risk Code	CDP26	Risk Title	Charnwood House
Service Area	Enterprise	Risk Owner	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	People First
Risk Description	1. Covenant restriction on use. 2. Statute restriction on use. 3. Viability of Listed Building consent conditions. 4. Demand for community hub. 5. Delays due to Asset of Community Value (ACV) listing.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	12-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Public communication and open days to market research intricacies of demand for community hub.		
Ongoing Work	- Proactive and frequent discussion of community hub proposals with covenant beneficiary and local interest groups. - Continue to update the public, as appropriate. - Possible need to select an architect with verifiable Listed Building experience. - Continue to monitor relevant changes to ACV legislation and Localism Act.		

Risk Code	CDP27	Risk Title	Museum Storage
Service Area	Enterprise	Risk Owner	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Funding the project. 2. Unforeseen issues with the development. 3. Lower utilisation of the commercial storage opportunity than expected. 4. Until the project is completed, risk of damage to items stored at the current facility (mainly reputational, but potentially financial).		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	18-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	- Approval for the project, along with progress in line with potential grant bid submissions. - Ensuring preliminary reports and surveys are carried out and that the main developer is accepting of certain risks. - Scrutinising Business Plans and consultants reports and ensuring all reasonable due diligence around forecasting and modelling has been carried out.		

Risk Code	CDP28	Risk Title	Local Government Boundary Review
Service Area	Legal & Community	Risk Owner	Jeanette Thompson
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Failure to meet set deadlines. 2. Failure to agree NHC consultation submission.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	19-Jan-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Regular contact with LGBCE. - Continued use of AEA consultant; ensuring sufficient information and responses provided to LGBCE.		
Ongoing Work	- Continuing oversight via Project Board (meetings scheduled, as appropriate).		

Risk Code	CDP29	**Risk Title**	Shared Prosperity Fund
Service Area	Resources	**Risk Owner**	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. Lack of general resources to deliver these projects as they are on top of those in service plans. 2. Failure to spend the money in the correct year, especially if there are delays in Government approval. 3. Lack of expertise in providing the required returns to Government on use of the grant. 4. Long lead times for capital elements means that items are unavailable until beyond the end of the funding period.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	03-Feb-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Undertook preparation work and responded promptly to requests from Government to get plan approved.		
Ongoing Work	- As the general "Resourcing" risk, a need to prioritise and drop the delivery of lower priority projects. - Use admin element of the grant to buy-in support for monitoring and returns. - Investigate the availability of required kit/materials and source at the earliest opportunity.		

Risk Code	CDP30	Risk Title	Churchgate
Service Area	Enterprise	Risk Owner	Steve Crowley
Year Identified	2022	Corporate Objective	A Brighter Future Together
Risk Description	1. The regeneration will not meet expectations of stakeholders. 2. Regeneration of the Centre and surrounding area is not cost effective/not affordable. Including impacts of high inflation and likely recession.		
Current Risk Matrix		Date Reviewed	01-Feb-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed			
Ongoing Work	1. Controls: - Communications and consultation plan in place, which is kept updated. - Decisions explained, including that there will need to be compromises. 2. Controls: - Financial and consultancy support (as needed) is in place. - Cost effectiveness/value for money is a key part of developing options.		

Risk Code	CDP31	**Risk Title**	Resourcing
Service Area	Resources	**Risk Owner**	Ian Couper
Year Identified	2022	**Corporate Objective**	People First
Risk Description	Vital additional actions require resources (e.g., staff and financial) to be redirected to enable them to be provided, which affects the delivery of other projects within the Council Delivery Plan. The cost of living crisis is leading to Government providing targeted support to individuals/households, some of which requires our support to administer. The shortage of staff and other resources may affect our ability to respond, even if money is available.		
Current Risk Matrix		**Date Reviewed**	03-Feb-2023
Opportunities			
Consequences			
Work Completed	- Used a consultant to support the Shared Prosperity Fund bid, through funding attached to the Fund. - Initial work in relation to the Homes for Ukraine scheme has subsided.		
Ongoing Work	Risk mitigations: - Consider getting in additional staffing resource (especially where New Burdens funding available). - Signposting to external resources and support. - Process automation.		

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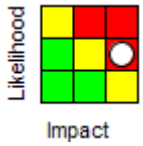
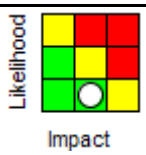
New Risks

Generated on: 4 May 2022

Risk Code	RR578	Risk Title	Resourcing
Risk Owner	Ian Couper	Updated By	
Year Identified	2022	Council Objective	People First
Risk Description	Vital additional actions require resources (e.g., staff and financial) to be redirected to enable them to be provided, which affects the delivery of other projects within the Council Delivery Plan. In the short-term, this is likely to include supporting the Homes for Ukraine scheme and providing financial hardship support.		
Ongoing Work	Risk mitigations: - Consider getting in additional staffing resource (especially where New Burdens funding available). - Signposting to external resources and support. - Process automation.		
Current Overall Risk Score	8		
Current Impact Score	3	Current Likelihood Score	2
Current Risk Matrix		Target Risk Matrix	
Date Reviewed	29-Apr-2022	Next Review Date	29-Jul-2022

List of Approved Council Delivery Plan Risks

Code	Title	Current Score	Target Score
CDP01	Museum/HTH Recovery	5	1
CDP02	Tourism Strategy	1	1
CDP03	Business Recovery: Grants	1	1
CDP04	Town Centre Recovery	3	1
CDP05	Health Inequalities	7	3
CDP06	Economic Development Strategy	5	3
CDP07	Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks	5	1
CDP08	Cycling Network	3	1
CDP09	EV Charging for Council Vehicles	5	1
CDP10	Royston Leisure Centre Solar Thermal	5	5
CDP11	Town Centre Strategies	5	1
CDP12	Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review	1	1
CDP13	Replacement of Royston Town Hall Annexe	5	2
CDP14	Customer Portal	5	5
CDP15	Help Residents Make Payments at Convenient Locations	5	3
CDP16	Supplier Self-Service	5	3
CDP17	Empty Homes Strategy	4	3
CDP18	New Ways of Delivering Housing on Council Land	5	5
CDP19	Work with Stakeholders to Increase Accommodation for Single Homeless People	8	5
CDP20	Local Plan Implementation	9	5
CDP21	Master Planning	5	3
CDP22	Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget	9	5
CDP23	Full Review of Council Tax Reduction Scheme	5	3
CDP24	Response to Government Resources and Waste Strategy	9	5
CDP25	Green Space Management Strategy	1	1
CDP26	Charnwood House	5	1
CDP27	Museum Storage	5	3
CDP28	Local Government Boundary Review	3	1

Risk Title	Pool Chemical Shortage	**Directorate**	Place
Risk Description	In view of current national (and wider global) chlorine, Polyaluminum Chloride (PAC) and Hydrochloric Acid shortages there is a risk that: - SLL will not be able to maintain the required stock of chemicals to operate our swimming pools at planned levels. - The cost of pool chemicals will increase significantly. This could lead to restricted usage, or possibly closing, at our swimming pools.		
Current Risk Level		**Target Risk Level**	

Date Reviewed	05-Jul-2022	Next Review Date	16-Aug-2022
Mitigating Actions Completed			
Ongoing Controls / Mitigations	- Current issues are with granulated chlorine and North Herts pools use liquid chlorine. - Currently maintaining maximum 4-week stock levels onsite. - SLL are reordering every two weeks to ensure the supply remains at maximum levels. - Regular discussions with SLL regarding stock levels. - Discussions with SLL regarding contingency arrangements should the risk materialise. - SLL are looking at alternative chemicals that can be used to ensure pools stay open.		
Notes	05-Jul-2022 Risk reviewed with Louise Randall on 5 July 2022. Although there remain national (and global) issues regarding the supply of certain pool chemicals, SLL continue to manage stock levels effectively and still assess the likelihood of us running out of required pool chemicals as being low. Therefore, no change made to the risk score.		
	18-May-2022 Currently, SLL feel the risk of us running out of pool chemicals is very low, as they are keeping on top of stock levels.		

Risk Title	Risk Description	Risk Level	Current Score	Target Score
Epidemics	An epidemic disease could result in: (1) a large number of staff being sick, (2) pressure to deliver an emergency or ongoing response to support residents and/or (3) a need to work from home and close services to contain the spread of the disease. These will have an impact on the services that the Council can deliver, and its resilience (including financial).		5	5
Latest Note	07-Oct-2022 When all resilience guidance/documentation has been updated to reflect lessons learnt from Covid-19, risk to be tolerated under current controls.			
Controls	Resilience guidance for an epidemic in place			
	Most staff able to work from home, if required			
	Awareness of key service areas and required prioritisation			
	Annual flu vaccination programme for staff			
Action Status	Mitigating Action	Progress		Due Date
	Update resilience guidance/documentation to reflect lessons learnt from Covid-19	0%		30-Apr-2023

Risk Title	Risk Description	Risk Level	Current Score	Target Score
Area wide loss of power impacts Careline	Area wide loss of power effects Careline's ability to provide services and/or increases customer demand for services. The risk could materialize from a loss of power at the DCO, at the Disaster Recovery site, to external infrastructure, to customers' homes and to homeworkers. Some service users may only have one cell tower in range, so calls to Careline may be prevented.		8	6
Latest Note	31-Oct-2022 Waiting on a decision by HCC on funding some of the further mitigation options. Therefore, due dates still to be confirmed. IT are due to test our response to a power outage and the effectiveness of our back-up generator to assess general resilience arrangements, which will check our ability to keep Careline up and running. Assistive Technology Manager confirmed that it is still a clear risk and so should be listed on the Risk Register.			
	Transfer operations to Disaster Recovery site (power loss at DCO and to external infrastructure).			

Controls	Rapid charge vehicles in other districts (power loss to external infrastructure).		
	Increase staffing cover and divert management to cover calls (power loss to customers' homes).		
	Transfer homeworkers to DCO or Disaster Recovery site (power loss to homeworkers).		
Action Status	**Mitigating Action**	**Progress**	**Due Date**
	Implementation of further mitigating activities	0%	31-Mar-2023

Risk Title	Churchgate	**Directorate**	Enterprise
Risk Description	1. The regeneration will not meet expectations of stakeholders. 2. Regeneration of the Centre and surrounding area is not cost effective/not affordable. Including impacts of high inflation and likely recession.		
Current Risk Level		**Target Risk Level**	
Date Reviewed	17-Aug-2022	**Next Review Date**	17-Nov-2022
Mitigating Actions Completed			
Ongoing Controls / Mitigations	1. Controls: - Communications and consultation plan in place, which is kept updated. - Decisions explained, including that there will need to be compromises. 2. Controls: - Financial and consultancy support (as needed) is in place. - Cost effectiveness/value for money is a key part of developing options.		
Notes			

Risk Title	Shared Prosperity Fund	**Directorate**	Resources
Risk Description	1. Lack of general resources to deliver these projects as they are on top of those in service plans. 2. Failure to spend the money in the correct year, especially if there are delays in Government approval. 3. Lack of expertise in providing the required returns to Government on use of the grant. 4. Long lead times for capital elements means that items are unavailable until beyond the end of the funding period.		
Current Risk Level		**Target Risk Level**	
Date Reviewed	15-Aug-2022	**Next Review Date**	15-Feb-2023
Mitigating Actions Completed			

Ongoing Controls / Mitigations	1. As the general "Resourcing" risk, a need to prioritise and drop the delivery of lower priority projects. 2. Undertake preparation work where no/minimal cost impact. Respond promptly to requests from Government to get plan approved asap. 3. Use admin element of the grant to buy-in support for monitoring and returns. 4. Investigate the availability of required kit/materials and source at the earliest opportunity.
Notes	

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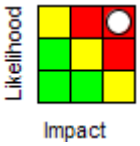
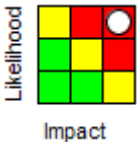
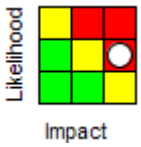
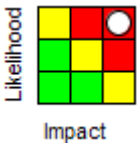
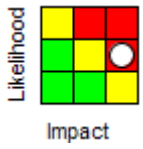
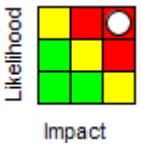
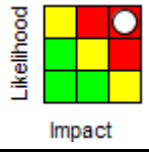
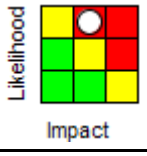
Archived Risks

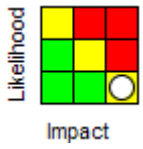
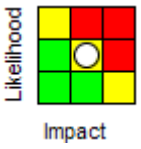
Risk Code	CR64	Year Identified	2018
Risk Title	Brexit (EU Transition)		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Notes	21-Apr-2022 In view of the latest update (19 April 2022), the risk entry will now be archived. The risk was originally created in 2018 to highlight and manage the general uncertainty pre-Brexit and in this respect, it has served its purpose. Although some related risks/issues remain, these are no longer solely linked to the EU transition, but linked to other emerging international issues. This approach aligns with the new Council Delivery Plan reporting arrangements, which confirmed that the risk entry will no longer be considered a Corporate Risk. Relevant service areas will consider if associated residual risks should be added to the risk register in their own right, and if this is the case, these will be managed at service level.		
	19-Apr-2022 This was handed over to the Response and Recovery Board last year to manage as part of the business as usual of the Council. In the context of other international issues that have arisen (ongoing covid and war in Ukraine specifically - and associated issues in relation to energy and food),this is not something that can be independently reviewed or managed by the Council.		

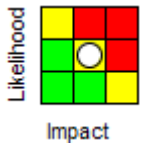
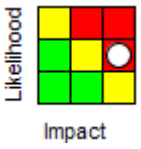
Risk Code	RR529	Year Identified	2013
Risk Title	Payroll Contract		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Note	01-Mar-2022 Risk reviewed by Rebecca Webb and Jo Keshishian on 28 February 2022. The payroll contract is now fully embedded with robust processes in place. The previously highlighted GDPR issue regarding potential data breaches has now been resolved. It has been agreed that the risk entry will now be archived, as the payroll contract is being managed effectively by business-as-usual activities and is at the target risk score.		

Risk Code	CR08	Year Identified	2003
Risk Title	Managing the Council's Finances		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Note	19-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived, as it has now been superseded by the new "Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget" Council Delivery Plan risk entry, which has the reference number CDP22. This was reported as part of the approval process for the revised Performance Management Measures for 2022/23, which align with the Council Delivery Plan (FAR, O&S and Cabinet - March 2022).		

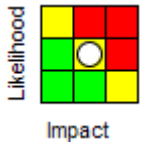
Risk Code	CR54	Year Identified	2006
Risk Title	Local Plan		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Note	01-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived, as it has now been superseded by the new "Local Plan Implementation" Council Delivery Plan risk entry, which has the reference number CDP20.		

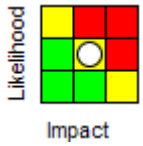
Risk Code	CR60	Year Identified	2011
Risk Title	Increased Homelessness		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Note	07-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived, as it has been superseded by the new risk entry related to the "Work with Stakeholders to Increase Accommodation for Single Homeless People" Council Delivery Plan project.		

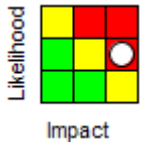
Risk Code	RR458.006	Year Identified	2011
Risk Title	Provision of a Homeless Hostel for Single People		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Note	07-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived, as it has been superseded by the Council Delivery Plan project and risk relating to "Work with Stakeholders to Increase Accommodation for Single Homeless People".		

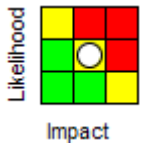
Risk Code	RR480.002	Year Identified	2003
Risk Title	Leisure Management Contracts		
Original Matrix		Final Matrix	
Latest Note	08-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived. For the last couple of years, the risks relating to the leisure management contracts have been recorded and managed via the "Covid-19 - Leisure Management Contracts" risk entry. As such, this risk entry has become redundant. Going forward, we will continue to record and manage relevant risks via the "Covid-19 - Leisure Management Contracts" risk entry, making appropriate amendments as we progress through (and leave) the recovery phase.		

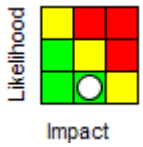
Risk Code	RR481.008	Year Identified	2012
Risk Title	Windmill Close, Barkway		

Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	05-Jul-2022 Risk reviewed with Chris Robson on 4 July 2022. The sale was completed on 4 March 2022. Risk entry archived accordingly.		

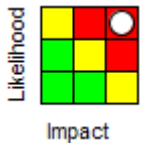
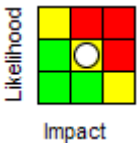
Risk Code	RR497	**Year Identified**	2013
Risk Title	Green Space Sustainability		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	06-Jun-2022 Risk reviewed and updated with Andrew Mills on 6 June 2022. This remains a low risk area for the Council. The risk entry has now been superseded by the new Council Delivery Plan risk entry “CDP25 Green Space Management Strategy” and as such, will be archived accordingly.		

Risk Code	RR517	**Year Identified**	2014
Risk Title	To promote the vitality and viability of our town centres		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	01-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived, as it has now been superseded by two new Council Delivery Plan risk entries - "CDP04 - Town Centre Recovery” and "CDP11 - Town Centre Strategies”.		

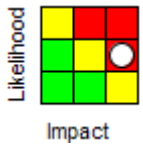
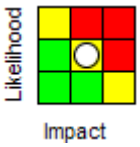
Risk Code	RR554	**Year Identified**	2017
Risk Title	Museum Service - Collections and Storage		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	10-May-2022 Risk entry superseded by the new Council Delivery Plan risk "CDP27 - Museum Storage".		

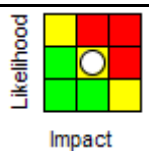
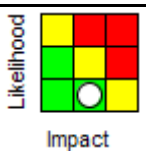
Risk Code	RR571	**Year Identified**	2020
Risk Title	Delivering the NHDC Parking Strategy 2019-31		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	01-Jul-2022 Risk entry archived, as the risks associated with the delivery of major related projects are now included in the Council Delivery Plan ("Resident/Public EV Charging in our Car Parks" and "Finalise Pay on Exit Parking Review"). The Strategy itself does not present a risk to		

	the Council, and the risks to the delivery of individual actions will continue to be assessed and managed on a project-by-project basis.

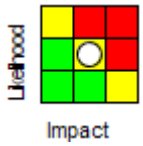
Risk Code	RR481.011	**Year Identified**	2013
Risk Title	Old Hitchin Museum		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	08-Aug-2022 Risk entry archived, as it has now been superseded by the new "Charnwood House" Council Delivery Plan risk entry, which has the reference number CDP26.		

Risk Code	RR585	**Year Identified**	2020
Risk Title	Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) - Recovery		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	05-Oct-2022 Lessons learnt exercise commenced, which once complete, will be fed back to the Covid Board. This will then allow the Covid Board to be formally closed (December 2022). As reported to FAR/O&S/Cabinet in March, residual risks now subsumed elsewhere e.g., "Financial Sustainability/Balancing our Budget", "Covid-19 - Leisure Management Contracts". Risk level now assessed as low impact/high likelihood, with any higher impacts covered by other risks. New risk entry created to cover future flu/pandemic risks and the proposal is to archive this Covid specific risk entry.		

Risk Code	RR090	**Year Identified**	2003
Risk Title	Development Control Service		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	16-Dec-2022 Risk entry to be archived. The risk will now fall under 'RR568 Regulatory - Staffing'. As the main focus of recent risk updates has been on staff resources, management of the risk fits better within the directorate-wide Regulatory staffing risk entry, as the causes and mitigations relating to DC are the same as other professional roles within the directorate.		

Risk Code	RR398	**Year Identified**	2007
Risk Title	Development Control - Income and Financial Risks		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	16-Dec-2022 Now that the Local Plan has been adopted and Member training has been delivered and embedded, there are no further actions planned to affect this risk. Officers monitor progress towards achieving the income budget figure and the impact of successful appeals		

	against Planning Committee decisions via regular budget meetings and this is an established business-as-usual activity. Relevant variances and changes to income targets are reported to Members via quarterly revenue budget monitoring reports, where appropriate. As a result, the risk entry will be archived.

Risk Code	RR481.005	**Year Identified**	2012
Risk Title	Ivel Court/Radburn Way, LGC		
Original Matrix		**Final Matrix**	
Latest Note	07-Mar-2023 Risk reviewed by Chris Robson on 3 March 2023. Disposal of this site was completed on 23 December 2022, achieving a capital receipt of £912,500. Risk entry archived accordingly.		

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RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK – PART 2 – POLICY (What you must do)

This policy applies to:	
Members	Yes
Officers	Yes
Managers	Yes

Officers / Managers - You Must:

- Consider Risk Management as an integral part of your job;
- Read and follow the guidelines in the Risk Management Framework documents;
- Identify and record any threats relating to service delivery in your own area.

Risk Owners – You Must:

- Record new Risks on Pentana Risk;
- Review existing Risks in line with the Framework requirements;
- Ensure actions are updated and completed;
- Ensure Risks are proposed for archiving/deletion when no longer required;
- Update Business Continuity Plans where relevant.

Members – You Must:

- Support and promote an effective Risk Management culture;
- Constructively review and scrutinise the Risks involved in delivering the Council's objectives;
- Ensure the Risk Management objectives are aligned with the objectives and strategies of the Council.

Policy author and further advice from: Rachel Cooper, Controls, Risk and Performance Manager.

Contents:

1. Definitions
2. Purpose of Policy
3. Identification and Assessment of Risk
4. Monitoring and Reviewing Risks
5. Promotion and Scrutiny of the Risk Management Process
6. Linked Policies and Procedures
7. Communication and Training

1. Definitions

Risk - Something that may have an impact on the achievement of our objectives. This could be an opportunity as well as a threat.

Risk Management - The "systematic application of principles, approach and processes to the identification, assessment and monitoring of Risks."
Risk Owner – Responsible Officer to whom a Risk is assigned. Provides assurance that the Risks for which they are the Risk Owner are being effectively managed, allocating appropriate resources and importance to the process, confirming the existence and effectiveness of existing actions and ensuring further actions are implemented.

2. Purpose of Policy

2.1 Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly to new pressures and opportunities. Managers need to consider Risk Management as an integral part of their job and the Leadership Team (LT) and Cabinet must keep the Corporate Risks faced by North Herts Council under regular strategic review.

2.2 Part 1 of the Risk Management Framework (the Framework) – the Policy Statement, sets out the seven principles underpinning how we will undertake Risk Management at North Herts Council.

2.3 Part 2 – the Policy, aims to ensure that Risk Management is undertaken in a consistent and effective manner through the Council, with Risks that are well documented, reported and understood. It highlights responsibilities and roles within the process.

2.4 North Herts Council is committed to the proactive identification and management of key external and internal Risks, which may affect the delivery of our objectives. This will allow us to be a Risk aware Council, who understands that Risks may increase as services evolve and we undertake more commercial activities. The Framework is designed to ensure consistent management of Risk and provides more detailed guidance for users. The Framework will be regularly updated to ensure we are in line with regulatory and best practice requirements.

3. Identification and Assessment of Risk

3.1 It is the responsibility of all Managers and Officers to identify and document key Risks within their service areas, which may affect the achievement of the Council's objectives. This should be done as part of the Service Planning process and updates to the Council Delivery Plan, but also continuously throughout the year.

3.2 When risks have been identified, they must be recorded and assessed using the Council's Risk Management software, Pentana Risk.

3.3 All Risks should be assessed in line with the requirements of the Framework, assigning an initial Risk Score, and taking into account any existing controls which may be in place.

3.4 Each Risk must be assigned to a Risk Owner, who takes responsibility for the risk. This should be someone who has the authority to ensure that required actions are carried out.

3.5 A set of mitigating controls or actions must be identified, with timescales for completion. All actions should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). The Risk should be assessed for a second time, taking the effect of the actions into account. This will become the Target Risk Score and will form the basis of the ongoing Risk monitoring. If the Target Risk Score is still unacceptable then it will be necessary to consider further mitigation actions.

3.6 Whilst assessing and managing the Risk, Officers should also consider and act on any opportunities which may present themselves. Further guidance on how to consider opportunities is provided within the Framework Part 4 - Toolkit.

3.7 Officers must ensure that the Business Continuity Plan for the Service area is updated with any new Risks, including how they can be mitigated to allow any key functions to continue operating.

4. Monitoring and Reviewing Risks

4.1 Once identified and recorded, Risks must be proactively managed by the Risk Owner. It is important that the Risk Register is dynamic – new Risks added as they arise and Risks removed when they have been managed down to an appropriate level. It is the Council's Policy to focus its resources on monitoring Risks which, because of their likelihood or impact, make them priorities. These are the Risks which score 4 or above on the Risk Matrix.

4.2 Risk Owners must review their Risks in line with the requirements of the Framework. Reminders will be issued automatically from Pentana Risk when reviews of risks are due.

4.3 Actions must be updated once completed, and the Risk assessed to see whether the Target Risk Score has been achieved. Further actions should be added if required.

4.4 When deemed appropriate, the Risk Owner should propose the archiving of any low level Risks scoring 3 or below which are no longer relevant and any Risks which they consider to have been managed down to "Business as Usual". They must also review the Business Continuity Plan for the Service area and update it with any changes which may be required following the archiving/closure of the Risk.

5. Promotion and Scrutiny of the Risk Management Process

5.1 The Leadership Team (LT) and Cabinet will support a culture of well measured Risk taking throughout the Council's business, by embedding Risk Management in our corporate business processes including strategic planning, corporate business planning, policy making and review, performance management and key partnerships.

5.2 All Managers and Members must consider Risk as an integral part of business planning, service delivery, key decision making processes, and project and partnership governance.

5.3 Business Continuity Plans must be maintained for each service area, identifying the key functions in a service, what the Risks are and how they can be mitigated to allow key functions to continue.

5.4 All Committee reports must contain a Risk Implications section, summarising the Risks the decision maker has to consider.

5.5 Members must constructively review and scrutinise the Risks to ensure they have been adequately considered, to enable delivery of the Councils objectives.

5.6 All new and proposed archiving/closure of Operational Risks, must be reviewed by the Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG) and LT prior to the changes to Pentana Risk being accepted.

5.7 Any changes to Corporate Risks and the Risk Management Framework must be reviewed by RPMG, LT and Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FARC) before being approved by Cabinet. Changes to Operational Risks should be discussed with the relevant Service Director.

5.8 Members of RPMG and FARC are responsible for ensuring the Risk Management process is aligned to the Council's objectives, challenging the process where appropriate and making recommendations to Cabinet.

6. Linked Policies and Procedures

6.1 Everyone is required to adhere to all Council policies, procedures and processes. The Risk Management Framework consists of four documents and all Officers, Managers and Members should ensure they have a good understanding of their Risk responsibilities.

Risk Management Framework – Part 1 – Policy Statement (The Key Principles)
Risk Management Framework – Part 2 – Policy (What you must do)
Risk Management Framework – Part 3 – Strategy (How we will do it)
Risk Management Framework – Part 4 – Toolkit (Operational guidance)

7. Communication and Training

7.1 The Council is committed to making training available to everyone. We will increase understanding and expertise in Risk Management through targeted training and the sharing of good practice and lessons learned. Training is available via e-learning on the Growzone, with further training available from the Controls, Risk and Performance Team on request. Some of this training may be deemed to be mandatory. Managers should identify and arrange any training that their staff require. All Officers should also request training on any areas that they are uncertain about.

7.2 A Toolkit is provided as part of the Risk Management Framework, which provides practical guidance on the use of Pentana Risk and all the associated tasks to be undertaken.

Risk Management E – Learning is available on Growzone at the link below.
https://northhertfordshire.learningpool.com/course/index.php?categoryid=22

Risk Management page on the Intranet
https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/doing-business/performance-and-risk-management/risk-management

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NORTH HERTS COUNCIL

RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

PART 3 – STRATEGY (How we will do it)

North Herts Risk Management Framework is outlined within four key documents.

Part 1 – Risk Management Policy Statement sets out the Council's commitment to the proactive management of external and internal risks within seven key principles. In order to ensure we can meet those principles, a number of objectives have to be achieved.

1 Maintenance of a robust and consistent Risk Management approach.
2 Considering any Opportunities which may present themselves whilst managing Risks.
3 Ensuring accountability and roles and responsibility for managing Risks are clearly defined and communicated.
4 Considering Risk as an integral part of business planning, service delivery, key decision making and project and partnership governance.
5 Communicating Risk information effectively through a clear reporting framework.
6 Increasing understanding and expertise in Risk Management through targeted training and the sharing of good practice.

Part 3 - The Strategy provides more detail on how the Council intends to ensure these objectives are met.

1 – Maintenance of a robust and consistent Risk Management approach

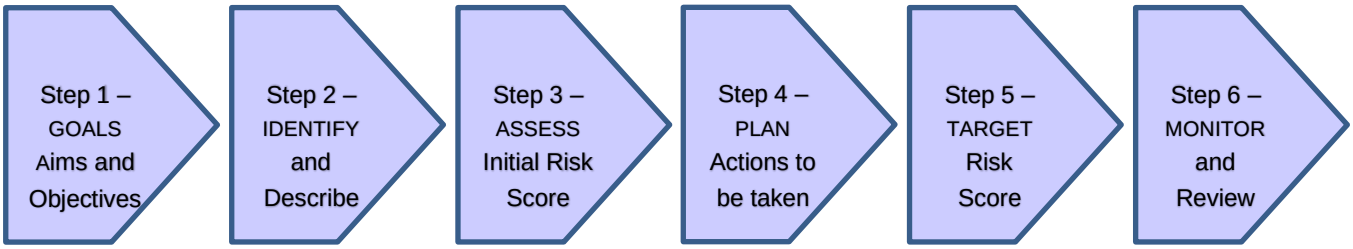
The objectives of the Risk Management Approach are to meet the seven principles outlined in Part 1 – Policy Statement:

- We will support a culture of well measured risk taking throughout the Council's business.
- We will not avoid risk but will identify and document key risks in all areas of our business, understand them and seek to proactively manage them. In managing risks, opportunities may present themselves. These will always be considered and acted on where appropriate.
- We will assess each risk, identifying existing controls and identify if further actions are required to reduce the risk. Where a risk is at a low level or has been managed down to a low level, then the risk will fall into business as usual and the risk entry will be archived. This allows actions and monitoring to be focused on higher risk levels.
- We acknowledge that even with good risk management, things will sometimes go wrong. Where this happens, we will use lessons learned to try to prevent it from happening again. We will have Business Continuity Plans in place for each of our service areas, which identify the key functions, what the risks are and how they can be mitigated to allow them to continue operating.

- We will develop capacity and skills in identifying, understanding and managing the risks facing the Council.
- We will challenge the Risk Management Process through the use of the Risk Management Group and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.
- We will regularly review the Risk Management Framework and update in line with statutory and best practice requirements.

Good risk management supports and enhances the decision making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly to new pressures and opportunities. Managers need to consider risk management as an integral part of their job and the Leadership Team and Cabinet must keep the Corporate Risks faced by the Council under regular strategic review.

The following six steps are used by the Council in managing its risks:



Step 1 – Identify Council Aims and Objectives

Before we can start to identify risks, we will establish context by looking at **what we are trying to achieve** and what our proposed outcomes are. These objectives will usually be detailed in existing documents, such as

- The Council Plan
- The Council Delivery Plan
- Service Plans
- Project Initiation Documents
- Partnership Agreements

Step 2 – Identify and Describe the Risk –What stops us from achieving objectives?

There are many different types of risks that we should consider. There are some examples in the table below. It is not necessary to detail all relevant risks, but the main ones should be considered.

Type of Risk	Example
Strategic	- Delivery of the key objectives of the Council - New political arrangements - Changes to Government policy
Operational	- Delivery and efficiency of services, specifically around day-to-day work - New initiatives, ways of working and relationships with partners - Monitoring arrangements - Levels of service usage - Day-to-day management of buildings
Information	- Accuracy of data, systems or reported information - Appropriate transfer and sharing of data - Security of data and systems - Management and control of knowledge resources, e.g. the retirement of a key member of staff
Reputation	- The Council's brand or image - Customer experience - Negative publicity - Levels of complaints - Levels of public confidence and participation
Financial	- Acceptance of liabilities - Levels of funding - Levels of income - Losses by fraud / corruption - Adequacy of insurance cover - Availability of funds to deliver services / projects
People	- Employees, e.g. recruitment and managing change - Management, e.g. communication / consultation and business continuity / emergency planning arrangements - The public, stakeholders and partners, e.g. changing needs / expectations, inequalities and safeguarding - Delivery of services to minority and disadvantaged groups
Regulatory	- Adherence to regulatory environments and compliance regimes - Legislation, e.g. Health & Safety at Work Act, Data Protection, FOI, Human Rights, Equalities Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty 2011, Employment Law, TUPE etc. - Grant funding conditions
Environment	- Recycling, Green Issues - Impact of planning policies - Climate Change - Management of Open Spaces

It may help to consider the **cause and effect** of each risk. For example, by using the following:

Description of Risk	Cause –why?	Effect – what will happen?
Risk of … Failure to … Lack of … Loss of … Uncertainty of … Delay in … Inability to … Inadequate …Opportunity to … Damage to …	… due to … because ...	… leads to … results in …

Step 3 – Assess Initial level of Risk when identified – How significant is it?

The Council assesses each risk in terms of its potential likelihood and impact, enabling actions to be prioritised. **We will actively monitor risks scoring 4 or higher on the Risk Scoring Matrix.**
Each risk should be assessed twice, to set both Initial and then Target risk levels.
The first assessment – the initial risk score - is taken on the "as is" basis–what is the risk if we do nothing further and just maintain any existing controls (the score should reflect whether these are currently operating effectively or not).
To ensure consistency, risks are assessed using a standard Risk Scoring Matrix, Likelihood (1-3) and Impact (1-3).
The matrix uses a "traffic light" approach to show high (red), medium (amber) and low (green) risks.

RISK MATRIX

LIKELIHOOD			
3	4	7	9
2	2	5	8
1	1	3	6
	1	2	3

IMPACT

Likelihood	
1. Low	Less than 20% likelihood
2. Medium	Between 20% and 60% likelihood
3. High	Greater than 60% likelihood
Impact	
1. Low	Consequences will be minor and associated losses will be small
2. Medium	Will have a noticeable effect on the Council
3. High	Can have a significant impact on the Council

4 Likelihood High (3) Impact Low (1) **Chance of it happening -More than 60%** **Consequences - Minor**	**7 Likelihood High (3) Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening - More than 60%** **Consequences - Noticeable effect on the Council**	**9 Likelihood High (3) Impact High (3)** **Chance of it happening - More than 60%** **Consequences - Significant impact on the Council**
2 Likelihood Medium (2) Impact Low (1) **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences - Minor**	**5 Likelihood Medium (2) Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences – Noticeable effect on the Council**	**8 Likelihood Medium (2) Impact High (3)** **Chance of it happening – between 20 – 60%** **Consequences – Significant impact on the Council**
1 Likelihood Low (1) Impact Low (1) **Chance of it happening – less than 20%** **Consequences - Minor**	**3 Likelihood Low (1) Impact Medium (2)** **Chance of it happening – less than 20%** **Consequences – Noticeable effect on the Council**	**6 Likelihood Low (1) Impact High (3)** **Chance of it happening – less than 20%** **Consequences – Significant impact on the Council**

Step 4 – Plan actions required to reduce the Likelihood or Impact of a Risk – what can we do about it?

Not all risks can be eliminated, but they can be reduced and/or plans can be put in place to deal with the effects. The following five general approaches are used by the Council when determining relevant actions to be taken.

Transfer	Use of insurance (to transfer the financial cost), or by contracting out services (this transfers some but not all of the risks and may create different ones).
Tolerate	It may not be practical or cost effective to take effective action against some risks. In this instance, the risk should be monitored to ensure the likelihood or impact does not change.
Treat	**Most risks will be in this category.** This involves putting in place a series of mitigation actions, bringing the risk score to an acceptable level. It includes contingency planning, describing what action will need to be taken if a risk is realised.
Terminate	Quick and decisive action to eliminate a risk altogether, which would usually be linked to stopping doing the activity completely. It is unlikely that the Council will be in a position to terminate the provision of a service.
Taking an Opportunity	In managing risks, opportunities may sometimes present themselves. For example, where the take up of a new chargeable service is unknown, it might be lower than expected (a threat), or it might be higher (an opportunity).

Actions should be **SMART** (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely).

Managers should list existing and additional actions required to manage the risks and set out Contingency Plans to be followed in the event of the threat materialising.
Each action should have a named Officer (the Risk Owner) and a target date for completion. The cost of the planned actions needs to be established and, wherever possible, should not exceed the cost of the risk they are mitigating. Cost may be identified as additional funding requirements or in redeployment of staff resources. Financial costs linked to a risk or opportunity should be included in the Corporate Business Planning process. The costs associated with dealing with any risk should it materialise should be assessed and provision made on the Councils Financial Risk Register, if appropriate.

When looking at risks, we will **also consider opportunities**. Planned actions to mitigate risk should be examined to see whether they open up new possibilities to help us achieve our objectives.

Step 5 – Aim – Set a Target Risk Score – what will the actions achieve?
Once the actions have been identified, the risk will be assessed again, using the same Matrix in Step 3, this time, taking into consideration the effectiveness of the identified actions in Step 4. This becomes the **Target Risk Score** and reflects the position where the risk is deemed to be **managed to an acceptable level**. If the actions in Step 4 do not manage a risk to an acceptable level, then it will be necessary to reconsider what mitigating actions should be carried out.

The Council uses the Target Risk Score to ensure that:

- **Risks are prioritised in terms of their significance;**
- **Actions are relevant and effectively managing and/or reducing the Likelihood or Impact of the risk;**
- **Risks are removed when no further actions are required.**

Step 6 – Monitor and Review Risks
Risk management is an ongoing process and risks will be reviewed regularly to ensure that actions are being completed.

Each Risk Owner is expected to conduct a review of their risks on Pentana Risk in line with the review schedule in Appendix A. These reviews should consider:

- Any new risks which have been identified.
- Whether actions have been completed by their target dates, or revisions required.
- Whether the Target Risk Score has been achieved.
- Whether additional actions are required.
- Whether risks should be proposed for archiving/closure.

Where a risk is assessed at a low level (1, 2 or 3) or has been managed down to a low level, then the risk will fall into business as usual and the risk entry should be proposed for archiving.
Where a risk is no longer relevant the risk should be proposed for archiving.

Any decision to archive/close a risk will be reviewed and agreed by the Risk and Performance Management Group, prior to the change being accepted on Pentana Risk. If the proposed change is not accepted, Pentana will be reinstated with the agreed score.

Regular reporting of Corporate Risks, through Risk and Performance Management Group, Leadership Team (LT), Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) and Cabinet enables senior managers and Members to be more fully aware of the extent of the risks and progression of recorded actions, along with any proposed archiving/closures.
Risk registers (Operational and Corporate) are maintained on the Council's risk management software Pentana Risk. This enables the Council to monitor and review risks and produce meaningful management reports.

2 – Considering any Opportunities which may present themselves whilst managing Risks

In managing risks, opportunities may present themselves. These will always be considered and acted on where appropriate.

These opportunities may take the following forms:

1. **Absence of Threats** - If the bad thing does not happen, we might be able to take advantage of something good instead. For example, if poor industrial relations do not lead to a strike, we might be able to introduce an incentive scheme and turn the situation round from negative to positive.
2. **Inverse of Threats** - Where a variable exists and there is uncertainty over the eventual outcome, instead of just defining the risk as the downside we will also consider upside potential. For example, where the take up of a new chargeable service is unknown, it might be lower than expected (a threat), or it might be higher (an opportunity).
3. **Secondary Risks** - Sometimes by addressing one risk we can make things worse (the response creates a new threat), but it is also possible for our action to create a new opportunity. Avoiding potential delays to a car journey by taking the train might also allow us to do some useful work during the journey whilst achieving a lower environmental impact.

Opportunities cannot be managed unless they are identified. When looking at risks, we will also ask whether their absence or inverse might present an opportunity. Planned actions to mitigate risk will be examined to see whether they open up new possibilities to help us achieve our objectives.

3 – Ensuring accountability and roles and responsibility for managing Risks are clearly defined and communicated

NHC expects all its officers and councillors to have a level of understanding of how risks and opportunities can affect the performance of the Council, in the achievement of our objectives, and consider the management of risk as part of their everyday activities.

Roles in the Risk Management Process

All Employees	• Manage day-to-day risks and opportunities and report risk management concerns to their line managers. • Identify any new risks relating to their service area. • Undertake risk management e – learning. • Attend training and awareness sessions, as appropriate.
All Members	• Support and promote an effective risk management culture. • Constructively review and scrutinise the risks involved in delivering the Councils objectives.
Cabinet	• Risk manage the Council in delivering its objectives. • Approve the risk management Policy and Strategy. • Consider and challenge the risks involved in making any "key decisions". • Responsible for oversight of Corporate Risks (with Leadership Team).
Finance, Audit and Risk Committee (FARC)	• Provide independent assurance to the Council on the overall adequacy of the Risk Management Framework, including review of proposed amendments to the Policy and Strategy prior to its presentation to Cabinet. •
Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S)	• Review of changes to Corporate Risk, and ensure that they are considered in relation to Council performance and the Council Delivery Plan.
Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS)	• Provide assurance that risks are being effectively assessed and managed. • During all relevant audits, challenge the content of risk registers. • Periodically undertake specific audits of the Council's risk management process and provide an independent objective opinion on its operation and effectiveness.
Leadership Team (LT)	• Champion an effective Council wide risk management culture. • Ensure all reports contain sufficient risk implications. • Ensure Members receive relevant risk information. • Responsible for oversight of Corporate Risks (with Cabinet). • Ensure Risks are considered and are part of updates to the Council Delivery Plan. • Ensure that Business Continuity Plans are in place for each service area.
Service Directors	• Risk manage their Directorates in delivering the Council's core objectives and outcomes and confirm annually they have done this as part of the Annual Governance statement process. • Update Risks as part of any updates to the Council Delivery Plan.

	• Constructively review and challenge the risks involved in decision making. • Ensure that appropriate resources and importance are allocated to the process.
Service Director - Resources	• Corporate Champion for Risk Management. • Promotes the adequate and proper consideration of risk management to senior managers and more widely within the Council. • Ensure the Internal Audit work plan is focused on the key risks facing the Council.
Controls, Risk and Performance Team	• Design and facilitate the implementation of a Risk Management Framework within NHC ensuring it meets the needs of the organisation. • Act as a centre of expertise, providing support and guidance as required • Collate risk information and prepare reports, as necessary. • Develop, support and promote the Council's risk management software Pentana Risk and provide Training where required.
Service Managers / Project Managers	• Responsible for the effective leadership and management of risk in their area of responsibility in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. • Identify, assess and appropriately document significant risks and opportunities. • Clearly identify risk ownership. • Manage risks in line with corporately agreed timescales and policies. • Escalate risks, where appropriate. • Review risks regularly and recommend for archiving where appropriate.
Risk and Performance Management Group	• Maintain the mechanism for risk management to be discussed and disseminated across the Authority. • Review and challenge the content of risk registers. Ensure that Risk is considered alongside Performance. • Provide direction and guidance to ensure that a risk based approach is taken to the development of policies and procedures. • Support the Controls, Risk and Performance Team to implement the Risk Management Framework effectively, including reviews of risk management training. • Review recommendations and amendments to the Risk Management Framework – Policy, Strategy and Toolkit.

4 – Considering Risk as an integral part of business planning, service delivery, key decision making and project and partnership governance

The Risk Management Strategy is an essential element of strategic planning and sits under the broader umbrella of the Council Plan.

NHDC has a Local Code of Corporate Governance, which includes risk management as one of the seven key principles:

"Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management."

For risk management to be effective and a meaningful management tool, it must be an integral part of key management processes and day-to-day working. The Managing Director and Leader of the Council must satisfy themselves that NHC has effective corporate governance arrangements in place so that they can sign and publish an Annual Governance Statement with the annual accounts. Risks and the monitoring of associated actions are considered as part of the Council's significant business processes, including:

- Corporate Decision Making – significant risks, associated with policy or action to be taken when making key decisions, are included in appropriate committee reports.
- Service /Budget Planning – this annual process includes completion of a Risk Questionnaire and updating the individual business unit risk registers to reflect current aims/outcomes.
- Project Management – all significant projects should formally consider the risks to delivering the project outcomes, before and throughout the project. This includes risks that could have an effect on service delivery, benefits realisation and engagement with key stakeholders (service users, third parties, partners etc.). https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/doing-business/project-management/nhdc-project-management-framework/project-risks
- Business Continuity – the Council has a duty to maintain plans to ensure that it can continue to function in the event of an emergency including plans for organisations that carry out services on the Council's behalf. The process identifies the key functions in a service, what the risks are and how they can be mitigated to allow key functions to continue operating. https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/about-nhdc/business-continuity/what-business-continuity
- Partnership Working – partnerships should establish procedures to record and monitor risks and opportunities that may impact the Council and/or the partnership's aims and objectives.
- Procurement – Contract Standing Orders clearly specify that all risks and actions associated with the purchase need to be identified and assessed, kept under review and amended as necessary during the procurement process. https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/council-constitution
- Contract Management – all significant risks associated with all stages of contract management are identified and kept under review.
- Information Governance – the Information Security Policy sets out practices and procedures to be adopted for good information management. There is also mandatory annual refresher training in Data Protection. The Information Security Policy can be found at: https://intranet.north-herts.gov.uk/home/about-me/hr-policies/information-security-policy

- Insurance – the HCC Insurance team manages NHC's insurable risks and self-insurance arrangements. The Manager presents a regular update to the RPMG.
- Health and Safety – the Council has a specific risk assessment policy to be followed in relation to health and safety risks. Health and Safety updates are taken to each meeting of the RPMG.

Corporate Governance
NHC's approach to risk management has been developed to support the key requirements of good corporate governance:

Openness and Inclusivity - Our approach to managing risks will be open and transparent and blame will not be attributed if decisions made in good faith turn out to be the wrong decisions. Officers, Members, partners, members of the public and outside organisations have access to information on our current risks and opportunities, including how we are managing them. Risk management supports and enhances our decision making process and all committee reports include information on the risks and opportunities in taking or not taking a recommended course of action.

Integrity - The control environment, which includes risk management, supports the integrity of the Council. The risk management framework is key to taking informed decisions and continued service delivery.

Accountability - There is clear accountability for our risks. This includes the risk section in committee reports; an Annual Governance Statement, approved by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and included in the Council's Annual Accounts; an annual report to Council on risk management; and the regular internal and external audit inspections of our risks. The Council's key partners and contractors must have their own risk management plans to suit the particular circumstances of their business and their key stakeholders. The Council has major shared objectives with its partners and the principles of our approach to risk will guide how we seek to tackle these objectives in a joined-up way. Wherever practicable, joint risk registers are put in place with key partners/contractors.

So that it can manage and demonstrate how well it has embedded risk management, the Council undertakes a regular review of the implementation of the Strategy across the organisation.

5 – Communicating Risk information effectively through a clear reporting framework

Appropriate and effective reviews and reporting arrangements reinforce and support the risk management processes. They allow sufficient and accurate performance information to be passed to Risk Owners, Senior Managers, the Leadership Team (LT) and Members.

The Risk Register
The Risk Register entries on the Council's risk management software - Pentana Risk, are the basic building blocks in the Strategy. The system generates reminder emails when the Next Review Date is approaching and generates up to date reports on a weekly basis, available for all to view on the system.

A Directorate Overview of Risks is sent to each Service Director on a monthly basis, and taken to each Directorate's Management Team meeting at least once a year by a member of the Controls, Risk and Performance Team. This allows an overview of all risks to be discussed and any new risks to be suggested.

The Risk Management Group reviews all new risks, decisions on not to monitor risks, proposed archiving/closures and any lessons learned when risks are archived (particularly in relation to projects). This includes consideration of the residual risks.

Pentana Risk shows the Original Risk Score, the Target Risk Score and SMART actions with target dates for completion.

The risk matrix is used to plot the risks and to enable Service Directors to prioritise risk management activities that need to be undertaken to mitigate the risks. This risk information feeds into the Corporate Business Planning process.

The Risk Register also provides an understanding on how managing or capitalising on an opportunity can help achieve the objectives.

Corporate Risks
The Corporate Risks facing the Council are those that cut across the delivery of all services, key projects and those that will affect the delivery of the Council's objectives. They are the responsibility of the Leadership Team and Cabinet. Cabinet ensure the Corporate Risks are managed appropriately.

The Corporate Risks are discussed at the Risk Management Group and any significant changes are included in the reports to LT..

After consideration by LT, the Corporate Risks are reported to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee four times a year.

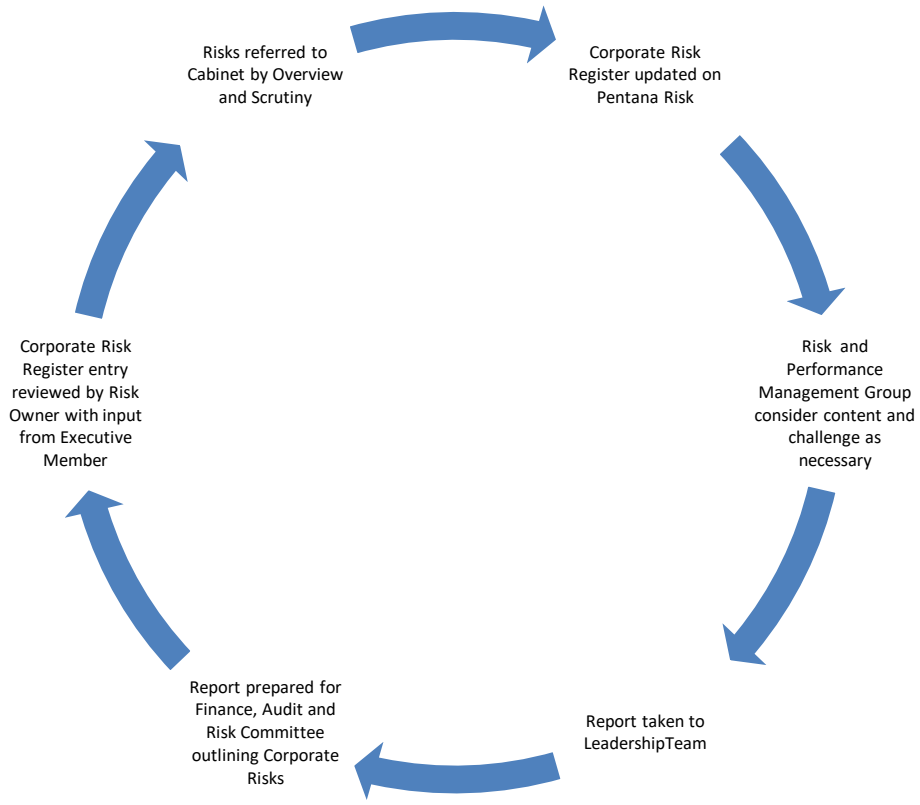
The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee monitor the effective development and operation of risk management within the Council. It agrees actions put forward by officers, where appropriate, and makes recommendations to Cabinet.

The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee refer any amendments to the Risk Management Framework Policy Statement, Policy and Strategy to Cabinet.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee refer any changes to Corporate Risks to Cabinet, as part of considering updates to the Council Delivery Plan.

Council receives an annual report on Risk Management from the Members Risk Management Champion.

Diagram representing the review of Corporate Risks



6 – Increasing understanding and expertise in Risk Management through targeted training and the sharing of good practice

Having developed a robust approach and established clear roles and responsibilities and reporting lines, it is important to provide Members and officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable them to manage risk effectively.

NHC uses a range of training methods to meet the needs of the organisation but primarily relies on intranet based e-awareness training. The E- Learning Module can be found on the GrowZone at the link below.

https://northhertfordshire.learningpool.com/course/index.php?categoryid=22

Risk management information is also available on the intranet, including templates and further detailed guidance in the Risk Toolkit.

A SIAS representative sits on the Risk and Performance Management Group, along with the HCC Risk and Insurance Manager, who is able to comment on wider risk management experience. This enables the sharing of good practice with others.

Appendix A - Review Timetable		
Risk Score 7 – 9 (RED)	There are significant risks, which may have a serious impact on the Council and the achievement of its objectives if not managed. Immediate management action needs to be taken to reduce the level of risk.	As a minimum – Review every 3 Months Individual Actions must be reviewed as they become due.
Risk Score 4 – 6 (AMBER)	Usually accepted, on the basis additional mitigating actions to reduce the likelihood are implemented, if this can be done cost effectively. Reassess to ensure conditions remain the same and existing/new actions are operating effectively.	As a minimum – Review every 6 Months. Individual Actions must be reviewed as they become due.
Risk Score 1 – 3 (GREEN)	These risks are being effectively managed and any further action to reduce the risk would be inefficient in terms of time and resources. Archive on register once agreed by Risk Management Group.	Only review if situation changes

Appendix B – Responsibilities / Oversight			
Task	**Corporate Risks**	**Service Risks**	**Project Risks**
Risks identified by:	Leadership Team Service Directors	Service Managers	Project Team Key Stakeholders
Risks owned by:	Service Directors	Service Managers	As appropriate
Risks reviewed by:	Service Directors Risk Owners	Service Managers Risk Owners	Project Managers Risk Owners
Risks scrutinised by:	Risk and Performance Management Group Leadership Team Overview and Scrutiny Committee Finance Audit and Risk Committee	Service Directors	Project Team
Risk Register (Pentana Risk) updated by:	Risk Owners with support from Performance and Risk Officer if required.		
Review of Risk Management Framework by:	Service Director - Resources Controls, Risk and Performance Team Risk and Performance Management Group		

RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK – PART 1 – POLICY STATEMENT (The Key Principles)

North Herts Council will be a risk aware Council that understands the risks that it is taking on. It appreciates that there are going to be risks in everything it does, but these are increased when undertaking projects, changing the way it delivers services and acting more commercially. It will address the risks it faces by adopting a risk aware culture and having strong risk management processes.

The Council will develop processes that allow it to focus on the significant risks it faces and ensure that undue time is not spent on low level risks and risks that have been effectively managed.

This leads to the following key principles:

Principles

1 - We will support a culture of well measured risk taking throughout the Council's business.

2 - We will not avoid risk, but will identify and document key risks in all areas of our business, understand them and seek to proactively manage them. In managing risks, opportunities may present themselves. These will always be considered and acted on where appropriate.

3 - We will assess each risk, identify existing controls and identify if further actions are required to reduce the risk. Where a risk is at a low level or has been managed down to a low level, then the risk will fall into business as usual and the risk entry will be archived. This allows actions and monitoring to be focused on higher level risks.

4 - We acknowledge that even with good risk management, things will still sometimes go wrong. Where this happens, we will use lessons learned to try to prevent it from happening again. We will have Business Continuity Plans in place for each of our service areas, which identify the key functions, what the risks are and how they can be mitigated to allow them to continue operating.

5 - We will develop capacity and skills in identifying, understanding and managing the risks facing the Council.

6 - We will challenge the Risk Management Process through the use of the Risk and Performance Management Group and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

7 - We will regularly review the Risk Management Framework and update it in line with statutory and best practice requirements.

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Shared Internal Audit Service
Hertfordshire in Partnership

Final Internal Audit Report

North Herts District Council
Risk & Performance Management
2022/23

April 2023

Issued to:	Ian Couper – Service Director (Resources) Rachel Cooper – Controls, Risk and Performance Manager
Copied to:	Anthony Roche – Managing Director FAR Committee Members
Report Status:	Final
Reference:	N088/22/001
Overall Assurance:	Reasonable
Recommendations:	5 recommendations, 1 High, 3 Medium, 1 Low

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2. Advisory Actions	6
3. Assurance by Risk Area	7
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

1.1 Internal Audit provides North Herts Council with an independent and objective opinion on the organisation's governance arrangements, encompassing internal control and risk management, by completing an annual risk-based internal audit plan. This internal audit forms part of the approved 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan.

1.2 The Council Delivery Plan brought together all the elements of Integrated Performance Management (Projects, Risks and Performance Indicators) into one plan in 2021. Previously, only performance indicators were approved by Cabinet with no clear link to the projects being undertaken or the risks being managed within and across service areas.

1.3 The new process requires the Cabinet to approve project, risks, and performance indicators to support the delivery of the Council Plan. Under delegation from Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committee (O&S) monitor progress against the plan on a quarterly basis. This has meant that the Finance Audit and Risk Committee (FARC) no longer receive regular reports on specific risks, but the Committee does still receive reports in relation to the development and continued effective operation of risk management.

1.4 The purpose and aim of the audit was to provide assurance that:

a) The Council Delivery Plan supports the risk management process of the Council, and strengthens the link between performance and risk, and

b) Officers and Councillors are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to risk management and have received adequate training.

Overall Audit Opinion

1.5 Based on the work performed during this audit, we can provide overall **reasonable assurance** that there are effective controls in operation for those elements of the risk management processes covered by this review. These are detailed in the Assurance by Risk Area Table in section 2 below.

1.6 In arriving at our overall opinion, we canvassed information from both staff and Councillors though an online questionnaire. Respondents provided data surrounding the availability and understanding of the key information contained within the risk and performance frameworks, along with feedback of the training currently available to them. A review of the committee structure, in relation to risk, was carried out to ensure that the changes which were introduced since the introduction of the Council's Delivery Plan continue to allow the Council to maintain effective oversight of its risk management framework and to manage its risks effectively. We provide below a summary of our observations and findings from each of the assurance areas reviewed within this audit.

1.7 The Council has a risk management framework, which had been broken down into four easily understandable parts. Within both the risk and performance framework, the roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders are appropriate and clearly explained. The framework also provides all key information we would expect as to how the Council coordinates and manages the processes making up the framework.

1.8 Whilst it was found that the Council has a comprehensive suite of documentation to support both risk and performance management, there are barriers to accessing the documentation on the Council's Intranet site. Risk and performance information was not held together, and officers reported that outdated documents were returned when key risk and performance information was searched for on the Council's intranet.

1.9 The Council Delivery Plan has directly linked risks to projects that the Council is undertaking to achieve its objectives. Therefore, information relating to risk and performance should be co-located to enhance the ongoing connection. The revised reporting structure to Cabinet, O&S and FARC strengthens the link between risk and performance, however as we are still within the first reporting year, changes to reports are being made, through discussion at the Councils Risk Performance Group, to ensure that the correct level of assurance is achieved.

1.10 Councillors have not received any formal training for risk and performance recently (and not since the new Council Delivery Plan was introduced in 2021). The results of the questionnaire confirmed that not all Councillors who responded had read the key risk and performance documentation (despite being members of either the Cabinet, O&S or the FARC). These two factors explain why not all Councillors could confirm which stakeholders were responsible for key activities and actions within the risk and performance frameworks.

1.11 The Council's internal Risk and Performance Group is normally attended by the Executive Member / Risk Champion and invitations have been extended to members of the O&S and the FARC. In the absence of any current training, the interactions and discussions at this group help mitigate the risk that Councillors do not have the necessary training, and so knowledge, to undertake their roles effectively.

1.12 The introduction of the Council Delivery Plan has meant that the responsibilities of the O&S and FARC have changed in relation to risk. Our review of the papers presented to these committees since the Plan was introduced identified that the Council's risk profile information is no longer presented to the FARC under the new arrangements. This information is a key source of assurance for Councillors on FARC and, alongside reports which provide updates on overall risk governance, is essential in giving them holistic oversight of the continued effectiveness of the Council's risk management framework.

1.13 For definitions of our assurance levels, please see Appendix B.

Summary of Recommendations

1.14 To improve the control environment in operation, we have raised five recommendations as part of the audit undertaken, one is a high priority recommendation and three of which are medium priority recommendations. We have

also highlighted two advisory actions within paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 below, which, whilst not presenting a material risk to the control environment, merit consideration by management.

1.15 The high priority recommendation relates to Councillors' risk management training. The medium priority recommendations relate to the current information available relating to risk and performance management, the risk profile of the Council being made available to the correct committee, and the embedding of risk and performance management processes.

1.16 Please see the Management Action Plan at Appendix A for further detail.

Annual Governance Statement

1.17 This report provides reasonable levels of assurance to support the Annual Governance Statement.

2. ADVISORY ACTIONS

2.1 During this audit, we identified the following findings that, whilst not presenting a material risk to the robustness of the control environment, merit attention by management.

Pentana Risk System

2.2 A review of the system found that only 63% of the registered users had accessed the system within the last two years. There are several reasons as to why officers do not log directly into the system themselves. This is primarily that they can access the information though a report provided to them by the risk and performance team. The service will, however, review the users within the system and update access as required.

Risk Management e-learning Module

2.3 The risk management e-learning module on GrowZone addresses the Council's Risk Management Framework, in particular Part 3: Strategy. This part of the framework was updated in December 2022. The updates made to Part 3 of the framework have not been reflected in the current e-learning module. We would recommend that, going forward, any updates to the Risk Management Framework are reflected within the e-learning module.

3. ASSURANCE BY RISK AREA

3.1 Our specific objectives in undertaking this work, as per the Terms of Reference, were to provide the Council with assurance on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls, processes and records in place to mitigate risks in the following areas:

Risk Area	No	Limited	Reasonable	Substantial
Policy and Strategy – The current policies, strategies and processes in place support the overall governance arrangements for risk management. There is effective oversight within the framework, committee structure and levels of reporting within the organisation such that the Council can continue to manage its risks in relation to performance activities.				
Risk Knowledge and Awareness – Officers (at all levels of the Council) and Councillors are aware of their responsibilities and have received appropriate training to undertake their roles. Data on risk awareness and knowledge will be collated from officers and Councillors via an online questionnaire. This will provide the information for us to deliver feedback on the risk environment of the Council.				

Overall				

3.2 See definitions for the above assurance levels at Appendix B.

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
1.	**Risk Training for Officers and Councillors** Risk management training is available through an e-learning module on GrowZone for all staff and Councillors. The module walks participants through the Risk Management Policy with the fourth module creating an example where the risk management principles can be applied. Training records confirmed that 107 staff had completed the module since 1 April 2021, but no Councillors were recorded as completing this training. When asked within the questionnaire if the risk training had helped staff to carry out their role, 77% confirmed that it had helped them. Others confirmed that it had raised awareness of the process and refreshers are useful to consolidate knowledge. It was confirmed by Director (Resources) and Committee, Member & Scrutiny Manager that there has been no formal Councillor training in the previous three years. Information is provided to Councillors, with opportunities to have anything clarified	High	We recommend: 1. Members of the Committees charged with the oversight of risks and risk management (O&S and FARC) or who need to understand risk attached to their decisions (Cabinet) will receive a bespoke level of training appropriate to their risk responsibilities. 2. Mandatory general risk management training should be given to all Councillors – at their induction.	1 To carry out further training with members of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee during the year. To also carry out risk training with Political Liaison Board (PLB) which includes Cabinet Members and Officer Leadership Team. **Responsible Officer** Service Director: Resources 2 New members have an induction programme that includes a session on finance. That session will be extended to also include a section on Risk **Responsible Officer** Service Director: Resources	31 December 2023 30 June 2023

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	as and when required. Committee papers have requested that Councillors/committee comments on and notes recommendations on the type of risk management training they would like to see going forward. However, no detail is recorded within the minutes. <u>Associated Risk</u> Our finding illustrates the benefit of training staff in risk as 77% confirmed that it had helped them within their role. Councillors, however, cannot evidence that they have received any formal risk training and results from the questionnaire confirm that they have not read key documents relating to how the Council manages its risk and performance frameworks. It is therefore unclear if Councillors have the necessary knowledge to ensure that their decision making is based on robust processes.		3. Risk training is available to all staff, but it is only mandatory for those members of staff with risk management responsibilities. It should be made clear to staff if they are required to complete the training and how often.	3 Agreed. We will undertake a review of the growzone training and update to clarify who should undertake the training and when. **Responsible Officer** Controls, Risk and Performance Officer	30 June 2023
2.	**Effective oversight within Risk and Performance Framework** The Finance, Audit & Risk Committee (FARC) focuses on the monitoring of the effective development and operation of risk management whilst the Overview	Medium	We recommend that the risk profile of the Council is made available to those required to give assurance on the Councils' risk	The format of the reports to FAR will be revised and the risk appetite and profile clarified following discussion	30 June 2023

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	and Scrutiny committee monitoring the risks which affect the Council Delivery Plan. FARC now only receive two risk reports a year, a mid-year (in December) and an end of year report (in June). The mid-year report will provide an update on the broader risks and mitigations and provide assurance that risk governance arrangements are working, and effective risk management processes are in place with detailed review of specific risks being able to be requested on an ad hoc basis. Whist reviewing the reports that have been taken to the committees regarding risk, we cannot confirm that the FARC is kept up to date with the Council's risk profile (analysis of the types of threats the Council faces) as outlined by the 2022 CIPFA Audit Committee Guidance. <u>Associated Risk</u> The new process had transferred the oversight of the risks in achieving the Council's objectives from the FARC to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with the monitoring of the risks involved in the delivery of the Council Delivery Plan. In transferring the overview of the		management processes.	with Leadership Team. **Responsible Officer** Service Director Resources, Controls, Risk & Performance Manager	

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	ongoing risks, it had removed the ongoing risk profile of the Council to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.				
3.	**Risk and Performance Policy and Strategy** As part of the questionnaire, all participants were asked which key risk and performance documents they had read: • 54% of officers who responded had read the Council Plan, • 31% had read the Council Delivery Plan, • 24% had read the Risk Management Framework, • 13% had read the Local Code of Corporate Governance and • 12% the Performance Management Framework • 39% had not read any of the above documents Of those respondents who confirmed that they had read the Risk Management Framework, 89% had read Part 1: The Policy Statement, 58% had read Part 2: Policy, 42% had read Part 3: Strategy and only 32% had read Part 4: Toolkit.	Medium	We recommend that all information regarding risk and performance can be pulled together and made easily accessible on the intranet site or desktop via a specific link. Key documents should be linked so that the connection between risk and key Council documents is available. Management can take this opportunity to review the information so that only current strategies / policies are available and launch the revised information via a Council-wide communication.	Agreed. We will shortly be moving to Sharepoint, so the review of information will enable us to ensure that only up to date information is retained as guidance. Communication can then follow **Responsible Officer**– Controls, Risk and Performance Manager	30 June 2023

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	Respondents stated that information regarding these documents was not easy to find on the intranet as searches returned out of date information. Information regarding risk and performance was not held together and not updated regularly. Officers within the risk team are a key point of information, with many respondents confirming that they are key sources of information for them. Only one Councillor who responded to the questionnaire had read all the key documents. Two Councillors had not read any. <u>Associated Risk</u> Key information on how NHC manages risk and performance frameworks is not reaching all staff or Councillors.				
4.	**Risk Awareness** Most officers set aside time to consider risk and performance management issues in their area. However, only 42% considered risk and performance management to be embedded within their area.	Medium	The importance of risk and performance should be highlighted by managers in planning and decision-making processes. Ensuring that staff and Councillors receive appropriate training will allow	See (1) above for training for Councillors and Officer Leadership Team. To also do some training with the Senior Management Group. **Responsible Officer**	31 December 2023

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	Most Councillors who responded were not sure if risk and performance was embedded within the Council but that senior officers understood its importance. One comment stated that fellow Councillors have low awareness or consideration of risk and that this needed to change. <u>Associated Risk</u> Without understanding the reasons for risk and performance management within service areas, processes will not become embedded, providing effective risk and performance management.		them to recognise risk and performance within their area and contribute to the embedding of the frameworks.	Service Director: Resources	
	Risk Responsibilities for Officers and Councillors Within the Risk Management Framework (Part 2: Policy) it states that the Council's Leadership Team and Cabinet have responsibility for keeping corporate risks faced by the Council under review. Only 10% of officers and 33% of Councillors got this question correct. Most thought that it was everyone's responsibility (employees and Councillors). 74% of officers confirmed correctly how the Council use the performance	Low	Key information within documents needs to be presented so that the audience is aware of its importance.	Agreed. Report templates to be reviewed with a view to adding a standard paragraph to highlight who is responsible for risk. Guidance updated to reinforce that report authors need to consider the impact of risks and highlight what needs to happen. Performance and Risk Team to provide more challenge to	30 June 2023 30 June 2023

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	management in practice. Councillors were asked to confirm who was responsible for several actions within the risk and performance frameworks. Councillors responding were members of either the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee, Overview & Scrutiny or Cabinet. • 55% recognised that all Members support and promote an effective risk management culture and 18% knew that all Members constructively review and scrutinise the risks involved in delivering the Councils objectives. • 63% confirmed that Executive members are the link between service teams and the Executive. • 67% confirmed that Cabinet had the political ownership of overall performance and 38% confirmed that they (Cabinet) approve the Council Delivery Plan. • 30% confirmed that Overview & Scrutiny receive regular performance management reports on Council performance • 71% recognised that it is Finance, Audit & Risk Committee who support Cabinet in approving			content. This will make the risk section clearer. Training at SMG on updated guidance and who is responsible for risk.	31 July 2023

No.	Finding / Associated Risk	Priority	Recommendation	Management Response	Target Date
	Council Delivery Plan, with specific focus on risk and areas of financial performance. <u>Associated Risk</u> Not all staff and Councillors were able to confirm who is responsible for key activities and actions within the risk and performance frameworks.				

Assurance Level	Definition
Substantial	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exist, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Reasonable	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
No	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Priority Level			Definition
Corporate	**Critical**		Audit findings which, in the present state, represent a serious risk to the organisation as a whole, i.e. reputation, financial resources and / or compliance with regulations. Management action to implement the appropriate controls is required immediately.
Service	**High**		Audit findings indicate a serious weakness or breakdown in control environment, which, if untreated by management intervention, is highly likely to put achievement of core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required urgently.
	Medium		Audit findings which, if not treated by appropriate management action, are likely to put achievement of some of the core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required in a timely manner.
	Low		Audit findings indicate opportunities to implement good or best practice, which, if adopted, will enhance the control environment. The appropriate solution should be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

Risk and Performance Management Group Terms of Reference

Introduction

Following the endorsement of a Risk & Opportunities Management Strategy and Policy, North Herts Council established a Risk Management Group (RMG) as part of its corporate governance arrangements. The development of a new Council Delivery Plan, linking risks to projects and performance indicators, further increased the remit of the Group to cover Performance alongside Risk. The Groups name will change to the Risk and Performance Management Group (RPMG) to reflect this change.

Purpose

To operate under terms of reference that address the Senior Leadership Team's approved Risk Management Framework and Performance Management Framework

Membership

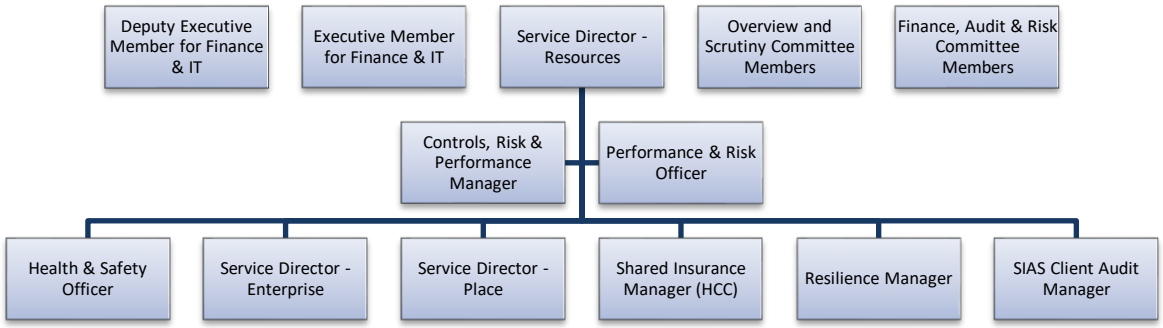
Representatives on the RPMG are managers (see structure) with strong operational knowledge of the Authority's functions who are committed to process and service improvement. The RPMG can invite other Officers including support functions (such as Finance, Legal, Human Resources) to attend meetings to provide information or give advice and support. A standing invite is also extended to members of the Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees. Representatives will:

- Attend meetings.
- Implement the terms of reference of the group.
- Consult other parties as required.
- Communicate the activities of the group.

Authority

The RMG is authorised by the Senior Leadership Team to carry out any activities within its approved terms of reference.

Structure



Duties

The objective of the RPMG is to oversee North Herts Council's Risk and Performance Management Frameworks. The RPMG seeks to focus and coordinate risk and performance management activities throughout the Authority to facilitate the identification, evaluation and management of all key risks and opportunities which may impact on the Council's ability to deliver its Council Plan objectives. In order to achieve this, the following responsibilities have been set:

1. Maintain risk and performance management as part of the culture at North Herts Council

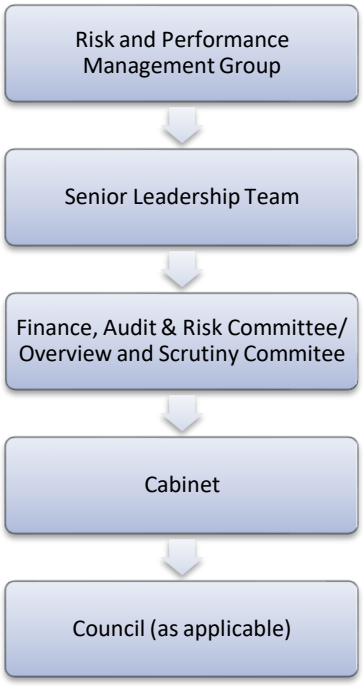
- Maintain the mechanism for risk management to be discussed and disseminated across the Authority.
- Present a comprehensive register of projects and risks to the Senior Leadership Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at least four times a year.
- Provide an update on the effectiveness of the Risk Management Governance arrangements to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee at least twice a year.
- Support the Controls, Risk & Performance team to effectively implement the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework, including reviews of risk and performance management training.
- Ensure actions required are given the appropriate level of support and priority.
- Ensure risk identification and actions are included as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.
- Continuously monitor the Risk Register to ensure timely compliance with remedial action and the identification of overlapping risks.
- Ensure Members are involved in the risk and performance management process.
- Provide advice and support to Officers and Members.

2. Targets

Targets	By Whom	Dates
Update individual risks on the Risk Register	Risk Owners/ Service Managers	In line with the frequency set out in the Risk Management Framework, which is determined by the assessed risk level
Identify and assist in prioritising the Corporate Risks and Projects included in the Council Delivery Plan, for consideration by Senior Leadership Team, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet	RPMG	Four times per year – November, February, May, and August
Review the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework at least every three years and in response to significant corporate changes	RPMG	November
Provide training to the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee, Members, managers, and staff	Controls, Risk & Performance Manager/ Performance & Risk Officer	Ongoing, as required or as requested
Annual Report to Full Council	RPMG/ FAR Committee/ Cabinet	May/June

3. Report Procedures

- The Service Director – Resources/Controls, Risk & Performance Manager will present to the Senior Leadership Team and the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee a progress report on the governance of risk management at North Herts Council and the activities of the group. These reports are to be on a half-yearly basis, with an Annual Report from Cabinet to Council. Any major significant issues will be reported to Cabinet/Council as soon as possible.
- The Service Director – Resources/Controls, Risk & Performance Manager will present to the Senior Leadership Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee a quarterly progress report on performance against the Council Delivery Plan. Any major significant changes will be reported to Cabinet/Executive Members as soon as possible. Changes required to the base budget are reported by quarterly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet.



4. Meeting Frequency

The RPMG will meet on no less than four occasions per year.

5. Roles

Service Director – Resources - Chair
To chair the RPMG and to ensure meetings are held on a regular basis and the minutes are recorded accurately. To champion risk and performance management throughout the Council. To facilitate risk management awareness and improvement at senior management and Member level.

Executive Member for Finance & IT
To champion risk and performance management and facilitate risk management awareness and improvement at Member level. To present the Annual Report to Full Council.

Deputy Executive Member for Finance & IT
To facilitate risk and performance management awareness and improvement at Member level.

Controls, Risk & Performance Manager
To report to the RPMG any issues arising from the implementation of the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework To write and present the risk management reports and the Council Delivery Plan on the RPMG's behalf. To provide support and advice on risk and performance management issues.

Performance & Risk Officer
To produce the agenda, relevant reports, and the minutes for each meeting. To report to the RPMG any issues relating to the day-to-day implementation of the Risk Management Framework and the Performance Management Framework. To provide support and guidance on risk and performance management issues.

Health & Safety Officer
To report to the RPMG any issues relating to the health and safety of the Council's employees or the public from their employment or use of the Council's assets.

Service Director – Enterprise
To represent the commercial side of the organisation and to champion risk and performance management in the Enterprise Directorate.

Service Director - Place
To champion risk and performance management in the Place Directorate.

Shared Insurance Manager (HCC)
To report to the RPMG any issues or updates relating to the Council's insurance arrangements and claims. To provide the RPMG with advice and information from a wider insurance and risk perspective.

SIAS Client Audit Manager
To provide the RPMG with advice and guidance from an internal audit perspective and to highlight significant issues resulting from the internal audit process. To also provide wider insight from shared learning.

Resilience Manager
To report to the RPMG any issues relating to the Council's Business Continuity functions. To provide the group with advice and guidance from a Business Continuity perspective.

Reviewed: November 2022
Next Review: November 2023 or sooner if required